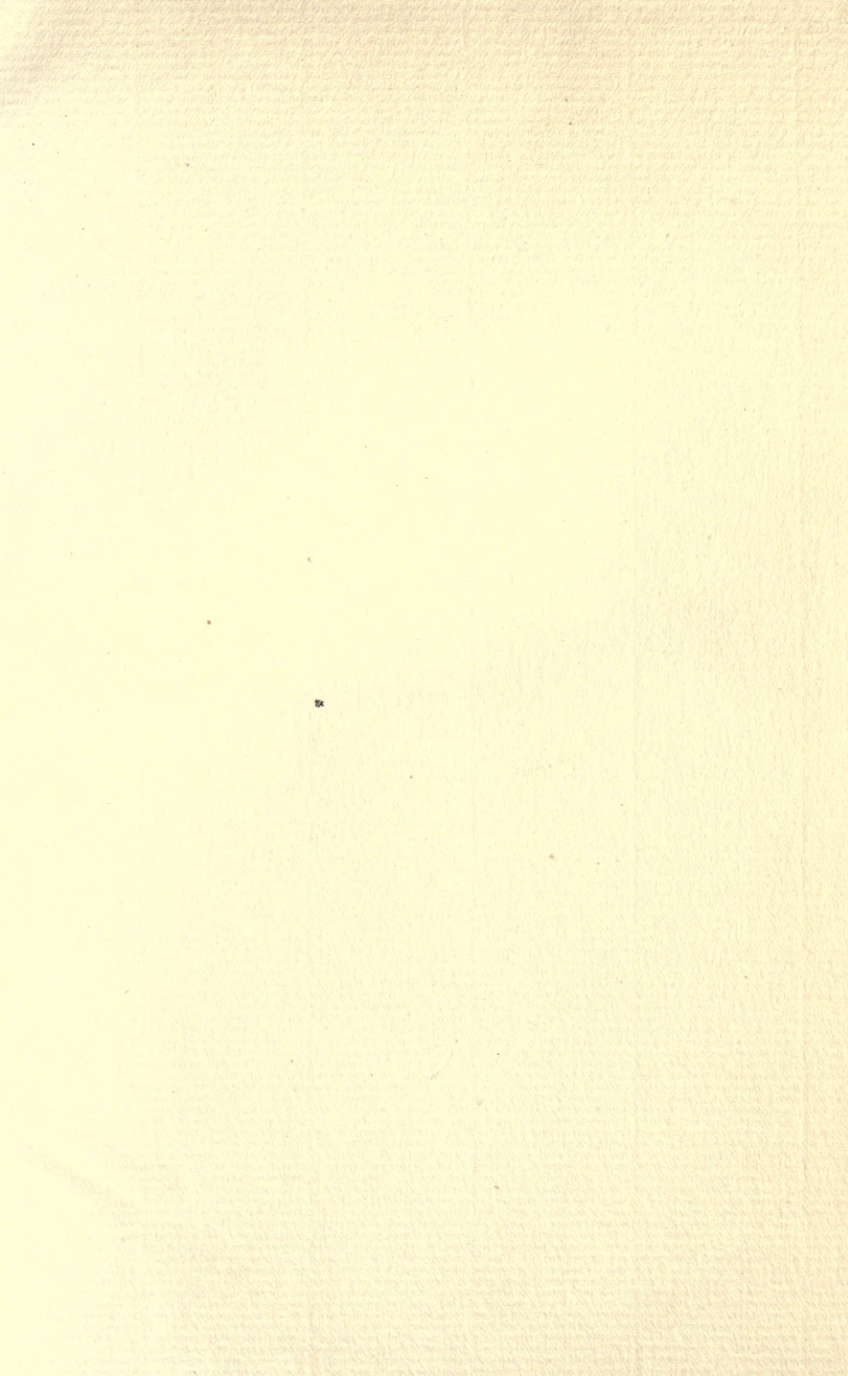




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NOVELS

BY

Paul de Kock

VOLUME XVIII

A RECONCILIATION

We had drawn near to each other, having both left the table to go to the window. I do not know how it happened, but I soon found Eugénie in my arms; then we kissed, we walked away from the window, and——

GEORGE S. BARNES & SONS

THE JEFFERSON PRESS

NEW YORK

II. RECOGNITION

It is not necessary to state what the
author has to say in the chapter. It is not a
chapter of facts, but a chapter of ideas. It is
a chapter of ideas, and it is a chapter of
ideas.

NOVELS

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Paul de Kock

VOLUME XVIII

LE COCU

PRINTED BY ARRANGEMENT WITH



GEORGE BARRIE'S SONS

THE JEFFERSON PRESS

BOSTON

NEW YORK

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PREFACE

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PREFACE

BECAUSE OF THE TITLE

I have never written prefaces to my novels; I have always considered what an author says in a preface, what he therein explains beforehand to the reader, as utterly useless. The reader would be entitled to reply, as Alceste replies to Orontes: "We shall see."

Nor have I ever supposed that the public read a novel in order to talk with its author. It matters little to my readers, I presume, whether I am young or old, short or tall, whether I write in the morning or at night; what they want is a work that pleases them, in which there is enough of truth to enable them to identify themselves with the characters; and if the author constantly talks of himself and stations himself between his heroes and his reader, it seems to me that he destroys the illusion and injures his own work.

My reason for placing a preface at the head of this book has to do with the title—that title which has caused persons to recoil in dismay who do not balk at *executions, damned, tortured, guillotined*, and other pleasant conceits in which authors indulge without objection. I propose, not to justify myself, for I do not think myself guilty, but to reassure some of my readers of the gentler sex, whom my title might alarm beyond measure.

Le Cocu! What is there so indecent in the word, pray? In the first place, what does it mean? A married man who is deceived by his wife, a husband whose wife is unfaithful. Would you like me to give my book such a title as *The Husband whose Wife was False to Her Vows?* That would resemble a Pontoise poster. Was it not clearer and simpler to take the one word which, alone, means all that?

You might have called it the *Predestined*, someone may say. My answer to that is that that title would have been excellent for those who understood it, but that very many people would never have guessed that it meant cuckold; that everybody is not familiar with such conventional language, and that I write to be understood by everybody.

But, after all, why enter upon such a crusade against a word so often and so happily employed on the stage? Who does not know that the immortal Molière called one of his plays *The Imaginary Cuckold*? I have seen that play acted, and consequently advertised in the streets of Paris, less than three years ago—at a time, however, when we permitted ourselves many fewer liberties than at present; and yet I saw no one draw back with horror or disgust, or indulge in any of these indignant, nervous outbursts on reading the poster of the Théâtre-Français on which the announcement of *The Imaginary Cuckold* was printed. I think, however, that we should be more strict with respect to what is said on the stage, than with respect to what is put in a novel; for, if I take my daughter to the play, and if the characters make unseemly remarks, I cannot prevent my daughter from hearing them; whereas it is a very easy matter for me to prevent her reading a novel in which such things are expressed.

But I repeat, the word cuckold should raise a laugh, and that is all. Is not that the effect which it produces at the theatre?

“Aye, this is very fine ; my children will be gentlemen, but I shall be a cuckold unless I look to it.”

(*George Dandin*, Act I.)

“Truly a useful lesson for our neighbor ;
And if all husbands who live in this town
Would thus receive their wives’ adorers,
The roll of cuckolds would not be so long.”

(*L’École des Femmes*, Act IV.)

“This popinjay, speaking with all respect,
Makes me a cuckold, madame, at his own sweet will.”

(*Sganarelle*, Sc. XVI.)

You shall learn, knave, to laugh at our expense,
And, lacking due respect, to make men cuckolds.

(*Sganarelle*, Sc. XVII.)

“His heart was seen to burn,
Despite us and our teeth, with an illicit flame ;
And so at last, striving to be convincèd,
I learned, nor boasted, he had made me cuckold.”

(MONTFLEURY, *La Femme Juge et Partie*.)

“What ! I myself cast blame and obloquy upon myself !
Myself proclaim the shame of my own wife !
And, although at last I am too well persuaded,
Seek witnesses to prove that she has made me cuckold.”

(*Ibid.*)

I know that someone will say: “What was all right long ago may not be right now; other times, other morals.”

I will answer: Other times, other customs, other styles of clothes, other hours for meals,—that is all very true; but as to other morals, I refuse to believe it. We have the same passions, the same failings, the same absurdities as

our fathers. I am fully convinced that we are no better than they; those passions and vices may be concealed under more polished forms, but the substance is always the same. Civilization makes men more amiable, more clever in concealing their faults; the progress of knowledge makes them better informed and less credulous. But whereby will you prove to me that it makes them less selfish, less ambitious, less envious, less dissipated? No; the men of to-day are no better than those of an earlier day, or than those who will live a thousand years hence, if men still exist at that time, which I will not assert, but which may be presumed. Let us not be scandalized to-day by what made our ancestors laugh; let us not make a show of being so strict, so fastidious—for that proves nothing in favor of our virtue. At the theatre respectable mothers of families laugh heartily at a somewhat broad jest, but kept women make wry faces, or hold their fans before their eyes.

Secondly, when authors go so far in what is called the romantic style, why should people be any more rigorous with respect to the jovial style, in regard to pictures of society? Because I describe a contemporaneous scene, must I be on my guard against allowing my pen too free a swing? Is that privilege reserved exclusively for those who carry us back to past ages, and who array their characters in vast top boots and short cloaks?

While I am addressing my readers, especially those of the fair sex, I cannot resist the temptation to reply to the criticism that has sometimes been made to the effect that I write immoral books.

Books that are merry, that tend to arouse laughter only, may be a little free, without being licentious for that reason. *Although sensuality is dangerous, jests never arouse it.* A work which makes the reader sigh, which

excites the imagination, is far more dangerous than one which causes laughter. Those persons who have failed to see the moral purpose of my novels have not chosen to see it. I do not consider it necessary to be morose, in order to offer a lesson or two to one's readers. Molière did not chastise the faults and follies of men, and turn their vices into ridicule, with a scowl on his face.

In *Georgette*, I have sketched the life of a kept woman; she ends in a way not likely to attract imitators. In *Brother Jacques*, I have depicted a gambler, and shown to what lengths that horrible passion may carry us. In the *Barber of Paris* two men yield to their respective passions, avarice and libertinage. Both are punished wherein they have sinned. *Jean* proves that a worthily placed passion may make us blush for our manners, for our ignorance, and may arouse our disgust of bad company and low resorts. In the *Milkmaid of Montfermeil*, I have tried to prove that money expended in benefactions reaps a better harvest than that squandered in follies. *André the Savoyard* is the story of a poor child of the mountains; by behaving becomingly, by assisting his mother and brother, by giving all that he owns to his benefactress, he succeeds in being happy and in conquering a hopeless love. *Sister Anne* is a girl seduced and abandoned. Her seducer, confronted by his mistress and his wife at once, is given a rough lesson. *The Wife, the Husband and the Lover* presents only too true a picture of the conduct of many married people. *The Natural Man and the Civilized Man* must demonstrate the advantages of education. If these works have not a moral, it is probably because I was unable to write them with sufficient skill to bring it home to my readers.

But I have said enough, yes, too much, of my novels; and all apropos of this poor *Cocu!* In heaven's name,

mesdames, do not let the title alarm you. The epigraph of the book must have reassured you to some slight extent: read on therefore without fear, do not condemn without a hearing. Perhaps you will find this novel less hilarious than you imagine; perhaps indeed you will think that I might have, that I should have presented my hero in quite a different guise. But if this novel, such as it is, does not please you, forgive me, mesdames; I will try to do better in another work; for *Le Cocu*, which I offer you to-day, will not, I trust, be the last that I shall write.

CH. PAUL DE KOCK.

LE COCU

I

A READING ROOM

"Madame, give me the *Constitutionnel*."

"They are all in use at the moment, monsieur."

"Well, then give me the *Courrier Français*."

"Here's the first sheet of it, monsieur. You shall have the rest in a moment."

"When I read a newspaper, madame, I like to have it whole; with this new fashion of yours, of cutting the paper in two, you sometimes make us wait at the most interesting places, and that is very unpleasant."

"But, monsieur, we can't take ten copies of the same paper! The expenses are big enough already! By cutting the paper, it is easier to accommodate a number of people, and the second sheet of the *Courrier Français* will certainly be returned before you have read the first."

"That is not certain. I am not one of those people who spend an hour reading a column. I want a whole paper."

"Will you have the *Débats*?"

"Very well, give me the *Débats*."

The gentleman who insisted upon having a whole newspaper, like the children who insist upon having a dish to themselves at a restaurant, although they often cannot eat half of it, had entered the reading room grumbling;

he took his seat upon a bench between two readers, one of whom, a young and courteous man, moved along to make room for him, while the other, who was old and wrinkled, with his hair brushed *à la pigeon's wing*, glanced crossly at the newcomer and turned his back on him after muttering in a sour tone:

"Be careful, monsieur, you are sitting on my coat."

I was standing at the door of the room, where I rarely remain long; I easily obtained a whole newspaper, because I selected a humble literary sheet; and in these days when politics engrosses everybody, mere literature is cruelly neglected. I can readily understand that people are interested in and absorbed by the interests of our country. There are times when I myself read the great newspapers eagerly; but even then I could not pass hours poring over them. What would you have? One cannot make oneself over, and politics has never been in my line. Indeed, I may be wrong, but it seems to me that that would be a most blessed country where the people were never called upon to busy themselves with politics.

I wanted to know what the papers said about the play that was produced the day before at the Variétés. One paper declared that it was detestable, another pronounced it delightful; is it possible to form an opinion upon such judgments?

"Madame, give me the *Quotidienne*, please, and the *Gazette de France*, if nobody has them."

"No, monsieur, nobody has them; here they are."

I turned to look. One often turns to look when one is not reading anything serious; I wanted to see the gentleman who had taken the *Gazette* and the *Quotidienne*. I saw a very tall, straight individual, with smooth, plastered hair, curly behind the ears; with a furtive eye and a honeyed voice; I was on the point of saying, with red

ears and a flushed complexion; in truth, he had both these, and if I had looked at him before he spoke, I could have guessed what papers he would have asked for. Some people claim that the face is deceitful; but no, it is not so deceitful as it is said to be, especially to those who take the trouble to examine it carefully.

I still held my paper in my hand but I was no longer reading it. I amused myself by scrutinizing all those faces leaning over the printed pages. It would have made a pretty picture for a *genre* painter. That stout man, with his elbows resting on the table covered with the conventional green cloth, had the air of a potentate called upon to arbitrate between neighboring kings. Sometimes he protruded his lower lip, dissatisfied doubtless with what was being done; but soon his expression softened, his mouth resumed its usual expression, and a slight nod of the head indicated that he was better pleased with what he was reading.

At his right, a short, gray-haired man was reading with an avidity which was depicted upon every feature. It mattered little to him that people came in and went out, coughed, blew their noses, or sat down beside him; his eyes did not leave for one second the sheet that he held before them, and they gleamed like a young man's. There was patriotism, glory, liberty in that expression.

Beyond him, a man of uncertain age, a man with a mania; that could be seen at a glance. The lamp must be exactly in front of him, his feet must have a chair to rest upon, and his snuff-box must be placed beside his paper. If all these conditions were not exactly fulfilled, then he was perfectly wretched and had no idea what he was reading. I soon had a proof of it: his neighbor moved his snuff-box with his elbow, whereupon he raised his eyes angrily and glared at the offender, muttering:

"It seems to me that you have room enough, and that it isn't in your way!"

It was several minutes before he could resume his reading in peace, and he did not do so until he had replaced his box at the same distance from his hand as before. But soon a more serious accident happened: as there were many people in the room, a newcomer ventured to take the chair upon which his feet were resting. Thereupon the man with the mania was completely upset; after glancing askance at the person who had presumed to take such a liberty, he rose, walked to the desk, angrily threw down the newspaper and a sou, and left the room, saying:

"It's outrageous! it is impossible to read the news when one is interrupted and disturbed every moment."

The man with the smooth hair had taken a seat in the corner at the end of the room. From time to time he cast a furtive glance about him; then he resumed his reading, but very quietly, without moving, without the slightest change of expression.

Just beyond him, a stupid faced man had been leaning over the same sheet for an interminable time; but he was not asleep, as I thought at first. That man was, so I was told, the terror of all reading rooms. He regularly took four hours to read an ordinary newspaper, and six to read the *Moniteur*. If those who let newspapers had many customers like him, they would have to charge by the hour, as at billiards.

I was about to return to my literary review, but my attention was distracted by a female voice which rang in my ears; anything of the feminine gender always distracts my attention. I instantly abandoned the regular customers of the reading room, and looked into the next room at the right, which was filled with tables covered

with books; for at that establishment books as well as papers were let; and in truth it was wisely done, for in these days, in order to earn one's living, it is none too much, in fact sometimes it is not enough, to do two things at once.

As I was standing between the two rooms, it was easy for me to look into the one devoted to books: I saw a woman of some twenty years, with a bright, wide-awake face. Her dress indicated that she lived near by; her head was uncovered; a black silk apron *à corsage* fitted her snugly; but her feet were in list slippers which were much too large for her, and she also had a thimble on one of her hands, which were covered with old gloves of which the fingers were cut off. She tripped in, smiling, and placed a package of books on the desk, saying:

"Here! we have *devoured* all these already!"

"What! why, you only got them yesterday!"

"Oh! we read fast at our house; my aunt doesn't do anything else, and my sister has a sore thumb and couldn't work; she often has a sore thumb, my sister has; and my brother much prefers reading novels to practising on the violin. I confess that I like it much better too, when he is not practising; it's so tiresome to have a violin forever scraping in your ears; oh! it sets my teeth on edge just to think of it. I have a horror of a violin—What are you going to give me? We want something nice."

"I don't just know, you read so fast; before long you will have read all the books I have got."

"We want something new."

"New! that's what all the subscribers say; they think that nothing is good except what is new; and yet we have some old novels which are far ahead of the modern ones."

"Bah! you say that to get me to take your *Cleveland*, your *Tom Jones* and your old *Doyen de Killerine* again."

"The *Doyen de Killerine* is a very good book, mademoiselle, and——"

"Madame, I don't take any interest in a hunchback hero with crooked legs and patches over his eyes. No! no! what I like is a handsome young man, very dark and well-built, with a noble carriage; he is all right,—you can imagine him and fancy that you are looking at him. When he makes love, you say to yourself: 'I'd like to have a lover like him;' and there's some pleasure in that."

The proprietress smiled; I did the same, while pretending to be engrossed in my paper. The young woman fluttered from one table to another; she would take up a book, open it, then put it back on its shelf, saying:

"We have read this; we have read this. Bless my soul! have we read everything?"

"Here, mademoiselle," said the woman who kept the room, "here's something interesting and well written."

"What is it?"

"*La Femme de Bon Sens, ou La Prisonnière de Bohême.*"

"Let's see whom it is by: translated from the English by Ducos. Why, this was published in 1798! Are you making fun of me, to give me such an old novel as this?"

"What difference does it make how old it is, when I tell you that it is good?"

"I tell you that its age makes a great deal of difference; we like pictures of contemporary manners. A novel more than twenty years old cannot depict the manners of to-day."

"But it may depict the passions and absurdities of society; those things are of all times, mademoiselle. That

is why people still enjoy seeing *Tartufe*, the *Misanthrope*, the *Etourdi*, although those works are certainly not new."

"Oh! it all depends on the taste. But I don't want the *Femme de Bon Sens*. Besides, I don't like the title; it seems to be an epigram."

"Well, here is something new—the *Bourreau de*——"

"Enough! enough! thank the Lord we have never cared for executioners—*bourreaux*—! we don't like the literature of the burying ground, the manners of the Morgue. It is possible that such pictures may be true to life, but we have no desire to go to those places to find out; we would shun with horror a street or square where preparations were being made to execute a criminal; and you expect us to enjoy reading books where the author persists in describing such horrors in detail, in presenting ghastly pictures! Oh! it seems to me, madame, that a man must have a very bad opinion of women to think that they will enjoy such reading, that such tableaux can possibly have any attraction for them. It is equivalent to coupling us with the wretches who rush in crowds to look on at an execution; and I did not suppose that there could be any glory in writing for those women!"

I could not resist the desire to look up from my paper; we like to meet people who think as we do, and as I agreed absolutely with that young woman in her views regarding literature, I looked at her with satisfaction. Chance willed that she should look at me at the same moment. I smiled, no doubt, for she made a funny little face and skipped away to another part of the room.

She soon returned with four volumes, and said:

"At last, I believe I have found one that we haven't read: *Eugène et Guillaume*. I will take this. It's by Picard; it ought to be good."

"You should not always trust to the author's name, mademoiselle; however, when it is by a writer who knows how to write, one is sure at all events to have something which will not offend in style, even if the plot or the incidents are not well done. You say that you will take *Eugène et Guillaume*?"

"Yes, but I must have something else with it. Four volumes! why, they will hardly last one evening. By the way, have you anything new by the author of *Sœur Anne*? He is my favorite, you know."

I could not help looking at the young woman with still greater satisfaction, for I am very intimate with the author whom she named.

"No, mademoiselle, I have nothing by that author that you have not read. But here is something that came out yesterday."

"Ah! give it to me, give it to me."

"I don't know just what it is, but so far as newness goes, I will warrant it."

"Let me have it."

"Will you promise not to keep it long?"

"Yes, yes; you know that it is only a matter of one evening with us."

"You will be very careful about cutting it?"

"Yes, yes! I must run now, or my aunt will say that I have been gossiping."

The young woman took all the volumes under her arm and went out, after casting another rapid glance in my direction.

She was succeeded by a woman with a round cap and calico wrapper. She brought back only a single book, which she laid on the desk, saying:

"Great heaven! we had hard work to finish it! I thought that we would never see the end!"

"It is true that you have had the book nearly a month."

"Oh, dear me! we don't read fast at our house; you see, as a general thing, my man reads to me while I am working; and as he still has the catarrh, he stops at every comma to cough. Never mind, it's mighty interesting. I cried hard with that poor girl who spends fifteen years in the underground dungeon, with nothing but bread and water to eat. She must have had a good stomach, I tell you, not to be sick."

"Do you want something else?"

"Yes, to be sure. Something about robbers, if you please, and about ghosts, if you have anything, because a novel with robbers and ghosts in it can't help being interesting. Oh! and then I want something with pictures, some of those lovely pictures of crimes. I am very fond of pictures, I am; and then you see, I say to myself: 'a novel that they don't spend the money to put pictures in, why it can't have Peru behind it.' Don't I hit the mark?"

"Here is something, madame, that will interest you greatly."

"What is it?"

"*The Ghosts of the Nameless Château, or The Brigands of the Abandoned Quarry.*"

"Ah! what a splendid title! what a ring there is to it! Let's look at the pictures. A man eating a skeleton. Bless my soul! that must be good. I don't want to see any more; I'll take the *Ghosts*, and I'll go and buy some jujube paste for my husband, so that he won't cough quite so much when he's reading."

The worthy woman who loved pictures was succeeded by an elderly man who also wanted a novel. He was asked what sort of story he wanted; but it mattered

little to him: he wanted it to read in bed at night, something that would put him to sleep right away. What he wanted was found at once.

After him came a lady on the decline. She brought back a volume of memoirs, and she wanted more memoirs; according to her, memoirs were the only proper thing to read. When a lady has passed the age for making conquests, I can understand that memoirs seem instructive to her and also pleasant reading; to her the past has more charm than the present. Being no longer able to tell us of what she does, she desires that we should be interested in what she has done; that is one way to keep people talking about her. After a life of adventures, she considers that to cease to occupy the public attention is a living death. Poor creature! I am sorry for her; she dies twice over. But see how mistaken she is! she falls into oblivion while seeking immortality; and there are some excellent mothers of families, simple, virtuous women, who nevertheless do not die altogether, for all who have known them treasure their images and their memories in the depths of their hearts.

The lady of the memoirs went away with eight octavo volumes under her arm. Next came an old gentleman powdered and musked as in the days of the Regency. He wore a little three-cornered hat which did not approach his ears, and a silk muffler over his coat, although it was only the first of October. This gentleman nodded patronizingly to the proprietress and placed two volumes on her desk.

"What the devil did you give me this for?" he said; "it's a wretched, detestable book."

"What! didn't you like it, monsieur? Why, it has been generally praised."

"I promise you that it will not be praised by me!"

"Then monsieur does not want the sequel? There are two more volumes."

"No, indeed, I don't want the sequel. It was as much as I could do to read three pages."

"Was that enough to enable you to judge?"

"Yes, madame; I always judge by the first few lines. I want something good, something useful—a romance of the times of chivalry, for example."

"I have *Amadis de Gaule*."

"I have read that."

"*Geneviève de Cornouailles*."

"I've read it."

"The *Chevaliers du Cygne*."

"I've read it. I've read all the old books of that sort. Give me a new one."

"Why, romances of chivalry are seldom written nowadays."

"What's that! seldom written? Why aren't they written, pray? You must have some written, madame; you must order some from your novel writers."

"They say that they are no longer in vogue, monsieur."

"They don't know what they are talking about; there is nothing else so good; that is the true type of novel. But these modern authors do not understand the taste of their readers. They write books in which they aim to be bright and realistic. They draw pictures of society, as if such things could be compared with a description of a tournament! In the old days they used to write much better novels. Those of the younger Crébillon were not without merit; those of Mademoiselle de Scudéry were a little too long, I admit; but *Le Sopha*, *Le Bijoux Indiscrets*, and *Angola*—those are fine stories, sparkling with delectable details!"

"If monsieur would like *L'Enfant du Carnaval*, by Pigault-Lebrun, that too is full of very amusing incidents."

"No, madame, no; I don't read such books as that. What do you take me for? That is so broad! why, there's a certain dish of spinach, which——"

"Which makes one laugh, monsieur, whereas your Angola makes one blush, or even worse."

"Madame, give me a romance of chivalry. I want to teach my grandson, and certainly that is the only sort of reading that can be at once useful and agreeable to him."

"Would monsieur like *Don Quixote*?"

"*Don Quixote*! fie, madame! your Cervantes is an impertinent fellow, a knave, a sneak, who presumes to ridicule the noblest, most gallant, most revered things in the world! If that Cervantes had lived in my time, madame, I would have made him retract his *Don Quixote*, or else, by the shades of my ancestors, I swear that he would have passed an uncomfortable quarter of an hour!"

The proprietress pretended to have a paroxysm of coughing in order to conceal her desire to laugh. As for myself, I could not contain myself, I burst out laughing and the paper fell from my hands. The man with the muffler turned in my direction; he eyed me indignantly and put his right hand to his left side, whether in search of a sword, in order to treat me as he would have treated Miguel Cervantes, I do not know. But, instead of a weapon, his hand came into contact with nothing more than a bonbon box; he opened that, and took out two or three pastilles which he put in his mouth with a dignified air, and said to the woman:

"Come, let us have done with this. What are you going to give me, madame?"

"Perhaps monsieur is not familiar with the story of the *Quatre Fils Aymon*?"

"I have read it three times, but I shall be glad to read it again. Give me the story of the *Fils Aymon*, and I will let my grandson meditate upon it; it will not be my fault if I do not make a Richardet of him."

The gentleman put the book under his muffler; then he flashed an angry glance at me, and probably proposed to make a very dignified exit; unfortunately, as he glanced at me, he failed to see a lady who was coming in; and when he turned, he collided with her; the lady's hat knocked off his three-cornered one, which was carefully balanced on his head. The little old man picked up his hat and pulled it over his eyes, muttering: "What are we coming to?" and went out, slamming the door so viciously that he nearly broke all the glass, which action I considered by no means worthy of an old chevalier.

The lady who had knocked off the little hat was young and rather pretty; a half veil thrown back over her hood did not conceal her features; indeed, her eyes did not indicate a person who shrank from being noticed; far from it. But there was in her dress a mixture of coquetry and slovenliness, of pretension and poverty; she had in her hand a pamphlet which she tossed upon the desk, saying:

"I have brought back the *Chevilles de Maître Adam*; how much do I owe you?"

"Six sous, mademoiselle."

"What! six sous for a farce which I have kept only three days,—just long enough to copy my part?"

"That is the price, mademoiselle. You gave me thirty sous as security; here's twenty-four."

"Why, it's an exorbitant price, madame—six sous! I hire very often, but I have never paid so much as that."

It would be as cheap to buy the thing. How much does it cost?"

"Thirty sous, mademoiselle."

"Great heavens! how they are putting up the price of plays nowadays! It's an awful shame! But I must have the *Mariage de Figaro*, to learn the part of Chérubin, which I am going to play on Sunday on Rue de Chantetreine. I can't learn my parts unless I copy them; writing seems to engrave them on my brain. I copied Nanine in one night and I knew it the next day. But six sous! that's rather hard. People think that it doesn't cost anything to act in society. I should think not! there's no end to the expenses. Costumes, rouge, bundles to be carried! Never mind, give me Figaro. I have never played in a burlesque yet, but my teacher told me that I ought to be very good in it, because I am not knock-kneed. Keep what I paid you; that will pay for this."

The *Mariage de Figaro* was handed to her. She turned over the leaves of the pamphlet, muttering:

"Oh! how short it is! almost no long speeches, and I am so fond of lengthy dialogues! I am sorry now that I don't play Suzanne. But I will copy both parts; then I can play the man or the woman as they want. I am not particular."

The actress-apprentice stuffed the pamphlet into her bag and went out, winding about her body an old shawl which looked as if it had often done duty as a turban for Zaire or Mohammed.

It must be very amusing to let books; you see a great many people and hear amusing things; there are people who instantly lay bare their folly, their absurdity, their wretched taste; but the business requires patience, especially when one has to do with such customers as the chevalier in the muffler.

I was about to return my newspaper and pay for it, when I heard a very familiar voice even before the person to whom it belonged had entered the door. I turned and saw my friend Bélan, who, in accordance with his custom, shouted as if he were talking to a deaf person, and found a way to occupy the space of four people, although he was very slim and his height exempted him from the conscription. But Bélan kept his arms in motion all the time, stood on tiptoe to increase his height, threw his head back, and went through the antics of a bear in a cage.

As he opened the door, Bélan spied me; he came toward me, exclaiming:

"Ah! I was looking for you, Blémont, my friend; I have just come from your rooms; they told me that you might be here, and here you are."

"Hush! hush! don't talk so loud," I said to Bélan, whose shrill tones caused a revolution in the reading room. "Wait a moment; I am at your service."

"My dear fellow, I have come about a very serious matter. I will tell you about it, and you will see whether——"

"Hush, I say; these people reading the newspapers, whom you are interrupting, don't care anything about your affairs; that isn't what they came here for."

"That is true, but——"

"Come on;" and taking Monsieur Bélan's arm, I dragged him away from the reading room.

II

OF THINGS THAT OFTEN HAPPEN

"Now, my dear Bélan, say on; we are on the boulevard, and you will not disturb anybody; but I advise you to lower your voice a little, for I don't see the necessity of taking all the passers-by into your confidence."

"Lower my voice, my friend! it is very easy for you to say that. But when one is as excited, as agitated as I am, it is perfectly justifiable to shout; it relieves one. Oh! mon Dieu! how will all this end?"

"You begin to alarm me, Bélan. What is it all about, pray?"

"Parbleu! love, intrigue, a woman—always women! as you know, I care for nothing else."

I could not forbear a glance at the little man. I knew that he was very well-built in his little way, and that many taller men had not calves as plump and shapely as his. But his face was so ridiculous—his turned-up nose, eyebrows absurdly high, heart-shaped mouth and big eyes formed such a comical whole, that I could not understand how he could ever inspire love; I could imagine it much more easily of an ugly face which was pleasant or intellectual; but I suppose that I am not a good judge, for Bélan was generally supposed to be a favorite with the ladies, and, as he had just said himself, he was constantly mixed up in intrigue. To be sure, Bélan was rich, and money is a potent auxiliary; many self-styled seducers owe their success to it alone.

Bélan saw that I was scrutinizing him. He stood on tiptoe again, and said to me in an offended tone, for the little man is easily hurt and irritated:

"You look as if you were surprised that it is about a love intrigue. Does it astonish you that I turn the heads of the ladies?"

"No, my dear fellow; but I am astonished that you are so excited, as it is nothing more than a thing to which you must be accustomed."

"Ah! but it is not always so serious as it is to-day.—You must know that I am on the best of terms with Madame de Montdidier?"

"Faith, no, I didn't know it."

"What! you didn't know that? A rake like you—a man after my own heart!"

"You do me too much honor."

"To be sure, I haven't mentioned it to anybody, for I am discretion itself; but such things are always noticed; ordinarily the husband is the only person who does not detect them."

"Has he detected something this time?"

"Listen: Montdidier is a quick-tempered man, brutal even, so his wife says; and more than that, horribly jealous."

"All this does not prevent him from being——"

"No, such things never do prevent it; on the contrary, they make one want—However, you will see that it necessitated extra precaution and prudence. He is not one of the husbands who go half-way to meet you, who constantly ask you to act as their wife's escort, to go with her to the play or to walk; one of those husbands, in short, who seem to say to you: 'Make me a cuckold; I should like it.'"

"It is true that there are some like that."

"What I had to do was to deceive an Argus, an Othello; I had to invent some stratagem day after day. Luckily I am never at a loss."

"You are very fortunate."

"To-day Montdidier dined out; a ceremonious dinner which he could not avoid attending. Thereupon we laid our plans. His wife pretended to dine early, and then she said that she was going to see her aunt; she did leave the house, in fact, but she joined me at a little restaurant on Boulevard du Temple. Everything passed off as we had agreed; we had an excellent dinner, et cætera, et cætera!"

"Yes, many *et cæteras*, no doubt."

"I beg you to believe that there were a great many. In the evening, Hélène—that is the name of my innamorata——"

"The name suits her very well."

"That is so, on my word! I hadn't thought of that. Well, Hélène had to go to join her Menelaus. Ha! ha! that is very amusing—Menelaus——"

"And you are Paris!"

"Just so, I am Paris. What a pity that I cannot laugh now!—Well, Hélène was to join her husband at Giraud's, who gives a reception to-night. You know Giraud, a loquacious fellow, who thinks that he's a business agent because he has three boxes standing on his desk, and who has a mania for trying to marry everybody, and that merely that he and his wife may be present at the wedding?"

"Yes, I know him."

"I was to go to Giraud's too, but not until later; we did not want to arrive together. People are talking enough already, and I have such a terrible reputation."

"Well?"

“Well, just now we sent out for a cab, and Hélène and I got into it. I ought to have let her go alone; but what can you expect? It is always so hard to part! That woman is exceedingly passionate.—Well, we were in the cab. You know that Giraud lives on Rue Poissonnière; I had told the driver to put me down at the corner of the boulevard. We were going along quietly enough, when suddenly we felt that we were thrown against the side of the cab; Hélène fell against the door, and I fell upon her; it was all because of an accident to the cab—one of the hind wheels had broken. We shouted like madmen. Hélène pushed me away with her hand, which she thrust into my eye, saying that I was stifling her; and I said to her: ‘Take your hand away; you are putting out my eye!’—Can’t you imagine the picture?”

“I observe that you had ceased to say sweet things to each other.”

“Faith! that we had; I believe that we were on the point of insulting each other. Just see how a broken wheel changes the nature of one’s feelings. Luckily we were more frightened than hurt. A crowd gathered about our cab. I succeeded in opening the door and jumped out first. But imagine my stupefaction when I saw her husband before me—yes, Montdidier himself, craning his neck to see what had happened.”

“Did he recognize you?”

“I haven’t an idea; when I saw him, I didn’t give him time to speak to me; I turned so suddenly that I nearly upset a peddler who was behind me. I pushed everybody out of my way, and ran to your room without stopping.”

“And your unfortunate companion,—did you leave her there?”

“Would you have had me offer her my hand, and play the gallant with her before her husband? It seems to me

that I followed the wisest course. But still, if Montdidier recognized me, and I am afraid he did; if his wife called my name; if—for he must have seen his wife get out of the cab—O heaven! such a hot-tempered, jealous man!”

“He is capable of doing his wife some violence.”

“His wife, yes, no doubt, and me too. She was forever saying to me when we were together: ‘Ah! if my husband knew, he would kill me! he would kill me!’”

“In that case he might very well try to kill you too.”

“It is terrible, it is most distressing. It isn’t that I am afraid to fight—you know that it isn’t that, because I have proved my courage; but the sensation, the scandal the thing will cause. And then, in reality, I’ve nothing against Montdidier. He always received me cordially, and invited me to dinner. I bear him no grudge at all.”

“You bore nobody a grudge but his wife.”

“No joking, my dear fellow; it is too serious a matter. This infernal mania for intrigues! But it is all over now; I don’t propose to deceive any more husbands. It is most absurd and it is immoral too; I am angry with myself for ever having done it.—What! are you laughing at me again?”

“Yes, I can’t help laughing; you remind me of the sailors who pray to God during the storm and laugh at Him when the weather is fine.”

“I don’t know if I resemble a sailor, but I do know that I feel very uncomfortable. This adventure so soon after dinner—the *charlotte russe* lies heavy on my stomach. Come, my dear Blémont, let’s not laugh; help me to get out of this fix; I will do as much for you, and you may need me soon, for you are a terrible fellow too,—the terror of husbands. Great God! how you have maltreated the poor devils!”

"If I can be of any service to you I shall be glad to, but I don't quite see how, unless I make Montdidier think that it was I who was in the cab with his wife; but that would not rehabilitate the reputation of his Hélène, and that is what we must think of first of all."

"That is so, that is what we must think of; although, since she put her finger in my eye, I am not in love with her at all. It is amazing how ugly she looked to me at that moment!"

"She has not always looked ugly to you. She has been kind to you, and you must try to acknowledge it by saving her good name."

"Yes, she has been kind to me, but I don't want any more of her favors. Oh, even if it can all be straightened out, I say again, no more flirtations with married women, no more illicit love-affairs. Unmarried girls or widows, women without entanglements,—they're all right; with them one doesn't have to hide all the time, to make long détours and hire cabs."

"All such dangers are what give piquancy to that sort of intrigue."

"Thanks; that same piquancy is very pleasant. Oh! just let me get out of this scrape, and I will turn over a new leaf, I will become incorruptible so far as the ladies are concerned. But if I am to have time to turn virtuous, Montdidier must not blow my brains out.—Come, my friend, let us think what it is best to do."

"Go to Giraud's; you can see whether Montdidier is there with his wife; and according to the way he behaves to you, you can easily judge whether he recognized you, and how he has taken the thing."

"Go there and expose myself to his fury, to his wrath, before everybody? surely you don't mean it, my friend?"

"A man of breeding doesn't take society into his confidence in such matters."

"I told you that Montdidier was a brutal fellow."

"If he thinks that he has been wronged, he won't go to a party with his wife."

"That is true; but there is another way to make sure, and that is for you to go to Giraud's. If our husband and wife are there, you can watch them, and you will be able to tell at once on what terms they are; furthermore, you might slyly give the lady to understand that you have just left me. What do you say? Oh! my dear Blémont, do me this favor; go to Giraud's."

"I will do it solely to oblige you, for the business agent's receptions are not very interesting; and this evening I intended to go to see some very agreeable ladies."

"You can see your ladies to-morrow, they will be in the same place. Besides, perhaps they are married ladies, and who knows that I am not saving you from some unpleasant scrape?"

"To listen to you, one would think that no one ever called upon a lady except with the design of making a conquest."

"Oh! you see I know you. Come, Blémont, sacrifice your ladies to me; consider that I am between life and death so long as I do not know what to expect."

"To oblige you, I will go to Giraud's."

"You are a friend indeed. It is almost nine o'clock, and the reception is just at its height. To-night there is to be singing and playing. Be prudent, and if our couple are there, watch them closely."

"I'm like the confidential friend in a melodrama."

"I will wait for you at the café on the corner of the boulevard; I will drink a glass of sugar and water. If

everything goes well, if I can safely show myself, you will have the kindness to tell me so."

"Very good."

We quickened our pace, and when we reached the corner of Rue Poissonnière, Bélan grasped my hand and shook it violently.

"My friend," he said, "I will wait for you at the café opposite. Don't say that I am there, don't mention my name."

"Never fear."

I had taken a few steps when I felt someone grasp me from behind; it was Bélan again; he had run after me, and he said most earnestly:

"My dear Blémont, I trust that this adventure will cause you to reflect seriously, that it will reform you as it will me. We must mend our ways, my friend. For my own part, I swear on the faith of Ferdinand Bélan, that the loveliest woman in Paris, if she is not free——"

I did not wait for the end of the little man's sermon; I smiled and left him, and walked up the street toward Monsieur Giraud's.

III

THE GIRAUD FAMILY

Monsieur Giraud's was a most amusing household; there was nothing extraordinary about it, however, for the absurdities that one met with there are common in society; but in order to be comical, things never need to be extraordinary.

Monsieur Giraud was a man of forty years of age; he had been a government clerk, a notary's clerk, a lottery collector; he had done many things, and I fancy that he had done nothing well; but he was as prying and inquisitive as a concierge, and he even pretended to be a ladies' man, although he was very ugly and his breath made his coming perceptible three yards away; which did not prevent him from speaking right into your face, the ordinary mania of people who have that infirmity.

Madame Giraud was about her husband's age. She was neither ugly nor beautiful; but unfortunately she was as pretentious as he, she always dressed like a provincial actress, and above all was determined to appear slender, at the risk of being unable to breathe.

Then there was a son of eleven, who was the very picture of his father and who still played with a Noah's ark; another son of four, who was allowed to do exactly as he pleased, and who abused the license to such an extent that there was not a whole piece of furniture in the house; and lastly, there was a little girl of eight, who assumed to play the mistress and to whip her two brothers, to show that she had already reached the age of reason. Add to these an ill-tempered dog which barked for five minutes at every new arrival, and a stout cat which always wore a collar of corks and had a plaster on its head, and you will know the whole Giraud family. I say nothing of the servant, because they changed servants every fortnight.

I do not know whether those people were rich—I am not in the habit of prying into things which do not concern me—but I do not think that they were in such comfortable circumstances as they chose to make it appear. I have an idea that Monsieur Giraud, who tried to marry

all the bachelors whom he met, exacted a commission—*droit*—for such marriages as he arranged; and it surely was not the *droit du seigneur*.*

I reached the house. I went up to the third floor. I heard children crying and recognized the voices of Mademoiselle Joséphine Giraud and her older brother. Blended with them were the strains of a piano and a flute, from which I concluded that the party was at its height.

I entered the dining room. A maid whom I did not know was filling glasses with sugar and water; I thought that she tasted it to make sure that it was good. The brother and sister were quarrelling over a piece of cake. At that moment Monsieur Giraud came from the salon, carrying in his hand a lamp with a globe; he came toward me with his lamp.

“Is it you, my dear Monsieur Blémont? Delighted to see you. Ah! why didn’t you come a little earlier? Céran just sang, and he was in fine voice; it was wonderful! And we have just had a concerted piece for the flute and piano. Two amateurs; and they played it with extraordinary fire. This infernal lamp won’t burn; I don’t know what’s the matter with it. Come in, come in. We have a lot of people. There will be more singing. And there are some very pretty women; there are several marriageable ones, my dear fellow, and with good dowries. If you should happen to want—you know, you will have to come to it at last.—The devil take this lamp; the wick is new, too.”

I entered the salon, but it was very difficult to move there; in the first place, the room was not large, and the

*The *droit du seigneur* was the privilege enjoyed by the feudal lord of first sharing the bed of every newly-married woman among his feudatories.

ladies were all seated in a circle which no man was permitted to break as yet; so that one must needs be content to walk behind the ladies' chairs, at the risk of disturbing some of them, or of treading on the feet of the men who were standing in the narrow passage. I know no greater bore than a party where the ladies are drawn up in that way, like borders in a garden, not talking with the men, and intent solely upon staring at one another from the top of the head to the soles of the feet, in order to see what they may criticise. To add to the discomfort which always prevails in such an assemblage, the salon was very dimly lighted: a large lamp, the mate of the one I had seen in Giraud's hands, diffused only a vague light; and a few candles, placed at considerable distances apart on the furniture, were not sufficient to supplement the light furnished by the lamps. All this, added to the silence of the ladies and to the low whisperings in which the gentlemen ventured to indulge, imparted a touch of gloom and mystery to the function; one might have imagined oneself at Robertson's theatre during the phantasmagoria.

I spied Madame Giraud in the passageway. She saw me too, and tried to come to me by pushing aside several gentlemen, and smiling at those who moved only half enough, so that they might have the pleasure of rubbing against her. At last we met. As I could not understand the behavior of those gentlemen, who talked in low tones as if they were at church, I ventured to inquire for the hostess's health in my ordinary voice, which drew all eyes toward me for a moment; it did not produce an ill effect however, for several young men, who probably had not dared to break the ice, at once began to talk more freely, and the mysterious whisperings became less frequent.

"If you had come sooner," said Madame Giraud, "you would have heard a fine performance. Ah! we had something very fine just now."

I was tempted to reply that it was not at all fine at present, but I did not do it; in society it is not safe to say all that one thinks; one who did so would be very unwelcome. In a moment, Madame Giraud exclaimed:

"Where on earth is Monsieur Giraud? What is he doing with his lamp? This one won't go now! How unpleasant it is!—What do you think of that young woman by the fireplace? Forty-five thousand francs in cash, and expectations. That is not to be despised. You will hear her in a moment: she is going to sing something Italian. Ah! how angry Monsieur Giraud makes me!"

At last Monsieur Giraud reappeared, proudly carrying the lamp, which diffused a brilliant light. He placed it on a table, saying:

"It will go now. There was only a little thing to fix."

"You must do the same with the other one now," said Madame Giraud, "for, as you see, that won't burn."

"Ah! that's so. Well! I'll take it out and do the same thing to it."

Madame Giraud detained her husband as he was going to take the other lamp, and said to him in an undertone, but not so low that I could not hear her:

"Just fancy that Dufloc refusing to sing!"

"The deuce! really?"

"He says that he has a cold."

"It's just spitefulness. It's because we haven't invited him to dinner."

"We must start something, however. There's no life at all in the thing."

"We had better begin the dancing right away."

"No, monsieur, it's too early."

"Then try to get Montausol and his wife to sing, or Mademoiselle Dupuis. Arrange that, while I attend to the lamp."

The husband and wife separated, and I, taking advantage of the renewed light, thought about fulfilling my mission, and I passed the company in review, to see if Montdidier and his chaste spouse were present.

There were in truth some very pretty women in that salon, and they would have been still more so if, instead of the yawns which they strove to dissemble, their faces had been enlivened by pleasure. There was one especially, near the piano; she was evidently unmarried. She was charming; her face betokened sweet temper and intelligence, and those are two qualities which one rarely sees in the same face. Lovely fair hair, not too light, blue eyes not too staring, a pretty mouth, a very white skin, pink cheeks, and refined taste in her dress and the arrangement of her hair; it seemed to me that there was refinement in every curl. She did not seem to be bored, which fact indicated that she was accustomed to society.

That young woman's lovely eyes caused me to lose sight of Bélan and his errand. But I suddenly spied Madame Montdidier. She was talking and laughing with the lady beside her. That seemed to me a good sign: if she had had a scene with her husband, it seemed to me that she would not be in such good spirits. To be sure, in society, people are very skilful in concealing their sentiments. I determined to look for the husband; a man is less adroit in concealing what he feels. Even he who is not in love with his wife feels that his self-esteem is wounded when he is certain that he is betrayed. That feeling should be visible on the face when it is so recent. Poor husbands! how we laugh at them so long as

we are bachelors! For my part, I hoped to laugh as heartily when I should be married. In the first place, I flattered myself that I should have a virtuous wife; a man should always flatter himself to that extent; and then—if—Bless my soul! is it such a terrible thing? I remembered La Fontaine's two lines:

“When one knows it, 'tis a very trifle;
When one knows it not, 'tis nothing at all.”

I did not discover Montdidier in that salon. I thought that he might perhaps be in the bedroom, where they were playing *écarté*. I tried to go there; but it was not an easy matter. I wondered if no one would make bold to break the circle formed by those ladies, and I determined to seize the first opportunity.

The dog barked; that announced new arrivals. That dog played to perfection the part of a servant. The newcomers were ladies. So much the better; it would be necessary to break the circle in order to enlarge it. And that is what actually happened. As soon as I saw an opening, I stepped in. A young man, who was not sorry for an opportunity to approach a certain lady, followed my example; then another, and another; the old story of Panurge's sheep. The circle was definitely broken. The men mingled with the ladies; it became possible to move about, and it was to me that they owed it! I had caused a revolution in Giraud's salon; a revolution, however, that did not cause anybody's death.

I had instinctively drawn near to the attractive young woman whom I had admired at a distance. She seemed to me still more attractive at closer quarters. I forgot that Bélan was waiting before a glass of sugar and water, for me to bring him life or death. It was hard for me to leave the place where I was.

But the piano began again—someone was going to sing. It seemed to me that I might remain long enough to hear the performance. It proved to be the Montausols, who were about to give us a duet. They must have been a very united couple; one of them never sang without the other. Imagine a short but enormously stout man, whose violet cheeks seemed on the point of bursting when he drew a breath, and who consequently was a frightful object when he sang in a stentorian voice that vibrated like a bass-viol. His wife was very short too, and at least as stout as her husband; she seemed to suffer terribly in her efforts to produce from her chest shrill tones that pierced the drum of the ear. The couple had a passion for difficult pieces; they proposed to regale us with grand opera. A lady was seated at the piano. The husband glanced at his wife, puffing like a bull during the prelude; the wife looked at her husband, raising one of her hands to mark the time. Each seemed to say to the other:

“Now, stand to your guns! Let us carry this by storm! Let us deafen them!”

The recitative began; at the third measure the audience no longer knew where they were. The husband and wife hurled their notes at each other as two tennis players drive the ball with all their strength. When one of them made a mistake or lagged behind, the other's eyes flashed fire, and he or she moved his whole body in order to restore the time.

As I had not sufficient self-control to watch the two singers with a sober face, I turned my eyes toward that young woman who was close beside me; that was the best way to forget the music. She was not laughing, but I fancied that I could see that she was biting her lips. It is a fact that one is sometimes sorely embarrassed to keep a sober face in a salon. She had raised

her eyes toward me; she seemed more embarrassed than before, and turned her head away. Perhaps my persistent scrutiny had offended her; perhaps it was ill-bred to gaze at her so fixedly. I did not think of that. I did it, not so that she should notice me, but because I took pleasure in looking at her. I made haste to turn my eyes in another direction, to give attention to the music. That wretched duet went on and on. The husband and wife perspired profusely. It occurred to me that they should be treated like those gymnasts to whom the spectators shout to stop when their performances become too terrifying.

I was amusing myself by watching our melomaniacs, when the lights suddenly went down; Montausol leaned over the music, and during the pauses in his part exclaimed impatiently:

"Snuff the candles, snuff the candles, I say! We can't see at all."

But the darkness was not due to the candles; it was the lamp which Giraud had fixed, which had suddenly lost all its brilliancy. Madame Giraud hastily summoned her husband, who was still busy over the other lamp. Giraud appeared with a huge pair of scissors in his hand and exclaimed:

"I don't understand it at all; it can't be the oil, for that is new."

"Papa," said the little girl, "I saw my brother Alexandre putting little lead men in the lamp yesterday."

"Parbleu! if that little rascal has been playing with the lamps, I don't wonder they won't burn. My wife lets him play with everything! Some day he'll upset my desk."

"It is impossible for me to scold my children," said Madame Giraud to the people nearest her. "As soon as

they seem to be unhappy, I am ready to be ill. And then little Alexandre is so cunning, so sweet!"

The mother was interrupted by a loud noise in the reception room; the dog barked and the little girl appeared at the door of the salon, crying:

"My little brother just upset the waiter with the glasses on it."

This incident turned the whole household topsy-turvy: the mother ran to her broken glasses; the father left his lamps to try to catch his son; and little Alexandre ran between everybody's legs and finally crawled under a sofa, sticking his tongue out at his father.

The duet came to an end amid this uproar; indeed the singers had continued to sing after the other guests had ceased to pay any heed to them. So the Montausols left the piano, in evident ill humor. They took seats behind me, saying to each other:

"They won't catch me singing at their house again!"

"I should think not. These people don't know what good music is."

"No, they must always have something new! We will go away after the punch."

"Yes, if there is any."

I left the salon and walked into the bedroom. I saw Montdidier talking with several men. I could detect nothing unusual in his face, but he was talking earnestly. I drew near with apparent indifference. Indeed, I was at liberty to listen with the rest; there was no secrecy about it.

"Yes, messieurs," said Montdidier, "I arrived just as the cab tipped over. My wife was coming from her aunt's and was on her way here. But the one who had the worst fright of all was poor Bélan. He was passing the cab, so it seems, when the hind wheel came off; when

he saw the cab toppling over in his direction, he thought that he was a dead man; and as the window in the door was open, he jumped through into the cab in order not to be crushed. He is very small, you know. My wife told me that he came in as nimbly as a monkey. Then, finding that the cab didn't move, he opened the door and escaped. My wife is convinced that, in his excitement, he did not recognize her; and that is probably true, or else he would at least have offered his hand to help her out of the cab. Ha! ha! ha! ha! Poor Bélan! I will have a good laugh at him when I see him!"

And Monsieur Montdidier began to laugh again, as did his auditors; I followed their example with all my heart; in fact, I was the one to laugh the most heartily. And so Montdidier, seeing how greatly amused I was, came to me and put his hand on my shoulder, saying:

"Did you hear about my wife's adventure?"

"Yes."

"And her meeting with Bélan? Wasn't it most amusing?"

"Exceedingly amusing!"

"I would give a napoleon if Bélan would come here this evening, so that I could have a little fun at his expense."

I made no reply, but I disappeared in the crowd in order to obtain for that unfortunate husband the pleasure that he desired. It seemed to me no more than fair that he should have a little pleasure.

I left the house unnoticed. I hastened to the café where the anxious lover awaited me; I found him before his third glass of sugar and water, pale and disturbed, drawing no good augury from my long absence. I made haste to reassure him, and told him laughingly what I had learned.

While I was speaking, Bélan's features recovered all their serenity. Before I had finished he was leaning over the table and holding his sides with laughter.

"This is charming! It is delicious! That will do, Blémont, that will do. I shall die with laughter.—So I jumped in through the window! Oh! these women! They have ideas, inventions for every emergency! I was a fool to be worried."

"That is what I told you a little while ago, but then you were not in a condition to listen to me."

"Yes, I admit, I was in torment—not for myself, but for her. But it is all right; let's not think any more about it, except to laugh at it. Waiter, take out the price of three glasses of water. I can't be at Giraud's soon enough. Is it a brilliant affair? Are there many people there?"

"It is not exactly brilliant, but there are a great many people, and I noticed some very pretty women."

"Pretty women!—Wait till I arrange my cravat."

"But you know, Bélan, that this adventure was to have reformed you; that you swore never again to have anything to say to the ladies."

"I did not include all ladies; those who are free are not included in my oath. And then, deuce take it! a man may say that in the first excitement. Let us go to Giraud's; I will sing; I know a new song. You will suggest to them to ask me to sing, won't you?"

"You evidently are determined that I shall be your confederate."

Bélan replied only by making a pirouette; he was in a state of frantic gayety. We walked to Giraud's, and I advised him not to come in until a few moments after me; I did not wish to have the appearance of having gone to fetch him, and I tried to return unseen, as I had left.

I found Giraud in the reception room, staring in dismay at his two lamps, which were on the point of going out. He did not see that I came in from outside, for he was entirely engrossed by his wicks; and he said as he handed one of them to me:

"This is incomprehensible. You will bear witness that I am putting in new wicks; we will see if they char like the others."

"Yes, I see that you take a great deal of trouble to entertain us."

"Oh! when they once begin to burn well!—Théodore, Monsieur Théodore, will you be kind enough not to touch the cakes! For shame! A great boy of your age!—He is more of a glutton than his little brother."

"Let me take one, papa; I want it to play at having dinner."

"Play at having dinner, at eleven years! Aren't you ashamed? Don't touch the cake.—But it's very slow inside! My wife don't know how to keep things going. We ought to begin to dance. Monsieur Blémont, it would be very kind of you to start the dancing."

"You know very well that I don't play the piano."

"No, but you might tell my wife to ask somebody to play a contradance. We don't lack players."

"Before I do your errand, pray tell me who that pretty young woman in pink is who was sitting near the piano?"

"In pink, near the piano—with gold ornaments in her hair?"

"No, she hasn't any gold in her hair; she is a blonde, rather pale, and exceedingly pretty."

"A blonde, pretty—you see there are several here in pink. Look you, when I have fixed my lamps, you must point her out to me."

I saw that there was nothing to be obtained from Monsieur Giraud at that moment, so I returned to the salon. A gentleman had seated himself at the piano, but not to play for dancing; it was to sing, to play preludes and detached passages, as he happened to remember them. Beside him was a friend, who, when he had finished one fragment of a tune, instantly asked for another, saying:

"And that air from *Tancrède*. And the romanza from *Othello*. And that pretty bit from the overture to *Semiramide*."

"Oh, yes!"

"Try to remember that."

And the gentleman played on, began, stopped, branched off to something else; in short, acted as if he were at home; you will understand how entertaining that was to the company. It had been going on for a long while, and the gentleman seemed to have no idea of stopping; it was as if the piano had been placed there for him, and we were too fortunate to have the privilege of listening to the preludes, the flourishes, and whatever he happened to remember. I have met in society many original creatures like that gentleman.

Bélan had been in the salon for some time; he had gone in before me. I saw him talking and laughing with Montdidier, and I guessed the subject of their conversation. Madame Montdidier looked uneasily at Bélan, for she did not know that he was forewarned of what he should say; but she was reassured when she saw that they seemed to be on the best of terms. Poor Montdidier did not seem to me to be so ill-tempered and so jealous as his wife represented. The ladies like to say that a man is very jealous of them; it flatters their self-esteem; and then too there would be no pleasure in deceiving men who did not care.

In vain did Madame Giraud bustle about to find a singer of either sex; every virtuoso had some reason for refusing. That annoyed the hostess, who was anxious to be able to say that she had had a concert before the ball, and who saw that everyone was doing his utmost to avoid listening to the essays of the gentleman at the piano. She made up her mind at last to say to him that the company desired a contradance; and the gentleman left the piano with a nonchalant air, running his hands through his hair and humming a fragment of Rossini.

I determined to invite the young woman whom I found so attractive; not that I intended to make a declaration during the contradance; such things are done only at a public ball, or possibly at a wedding party at a restaurant; but I proposed to try to talk a little, if she seemed to be in a talkative mood. There are many young women with whom it is impossible to obtain more than three words in succession when they are dancing. I arrived just in time and my invitation was accepted; we danced. I tried to say something besides: "It is very hot," or: "This is a very pretty dance." It is really very hard to think instantly of something to say to a person whom one does not know, especially when one would like to depart from the usual commonplaces.

But Giraud returned with his two lamps resplendent with light. There was a subject of conversation.

"We needed them; there is nothing so dismal as a badly-lighted ballroom; is there, mademoiselle?"

"That is true, monsieur."

"There are some ladies here, however, who might prefer a half light."

She contented herself with smiling.

"You have not sung, mademoiselle?"

"I beg pardon, monsieur, I sang one song."

"Then it must have been before I came. That makes me deeply regret that I came so late."

"You didn't lose much, monsieur."

"I cannot believe *you* as to that; but if—Ah! it's your turn."

The figure interrupted our conversation; it was most annoying, for perhaps we had made a real start.

After the figure I tried to renew the conversation.

"Will you not sing again, mademoiselle?"

"I sincerely hope not; I have paid my debt and that is enough."

"Are you not fond of music?"

"Yes, very fond of it,—with people whom I know. I do not see the necessity of entertaining people whom one has never seen, and who often listen only from politeness."

"You judge society already with——"

The deuce! another figure. At last the final figure came and the dance was at an end. No matter, I had had an opportunity to decide that the young woman was not a fool. Perhaps she would not have said as much of me.

I seized Giraud as he was about to turn up his lamps, which were already beginning to go out.

"You saw me dancing with that young lady opposite us?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was my partner whom I was asking you about just now."

"Oho! that is Mademoiselle Eugénie Dumeillan."

"Who is Mademoiselle Dumeillan?"

"She is the daughter of Madame Dumeillan, who is sitting beside her."

"My dear Monsieur Giraud, I have no doubt that that young lady is the daughter of her father and her mother;

but when I ask you who she is, I mean, what sort of people are they? What do they do? In short, I ask in order to learn something about them. How is it that you, who are a mine of information, do not understand that?"

"I do, I do. But, you see, she isn't on my list of marriageable women. However, she is of marriageable age, but they haven't begun to think about it yet; whereas that tall brunette yonder, in a turban—my dear fellow, she has a hundred thousand francs in cash. That's not bad, is it? Ah! if I were not married!—Wife, look after your son Alexandre; he will upset the tea-things, and all the cups will meet the fate of the glasses!"

"My dear Monsieur Giraud, I care very little about the amount of that tall brunette's dowry. Can you tell me anything more about the ladies opposite?"

"I beg your pardon. The mother is a widow; Monsieur Dumeillan was deputy chief in some department or other, I don't know what one; however, he was a deputy chief and he left his widow four or five thousand francs a year, I believe. Mademoiselle Eugénie has had an excellent education; she is an accomplished musician and she will also have something that an aunt has left her; I don't know just how much, but I can find out. She will not be a bad match; she's an only daughter. Would you like me to speak in your name?"

"Don't play any such trick as that on me! Who in the devil said that I proposed to marry? Can't a man open his mouth about a woman without thinking of marrying her?"

"I don't say no; but as one must come to that at last——"

"Papa, my brother Théodore is stuffing pieces of sugared orange into his pocket."

It was Mademoiselle Giraud who made this announcement. Giraud left me to whip his older son. Thereupon Bélan approached me.

"Haven't you told Giraud to ask me to sing, that he doesn't mention it?"

"Mon Dieu, Bélan, let us alone with your singing! We've had quite enough of it! We prefer to dance."

"That is because you have not heard me; I know very well that I should have given pleasure; I learned a tune on purpose. By the way, you don't know—Hélène treats me coldly, yes, very coldly; she doesn't like it because I ran away so suddenly when I saw her husband. Can you imagine such a thing? As if I could guess that she would invent a story on the instant! However, she can be mad if she chooses, it's all one to me; I no longer care for her in the least; I still see her putting her hand in my eye when we tipped over. She wasn't pretty then. I have views on that little woman in black yonder—do you see, a stout party, with an ardent glance; that is promising."

"But she is married; her husband is playing écarté; he is a receiver in the Registration Office."

"Good! so much the better, we will play some fine tricks on the receiver."

More dancing; this time Mademoiselle Eugénie was at the piano. She played with much ease and taste. I regretted that I was not a musician; I had given painting the preference. Painting is a delightful art, but it does not afford the same advantages in society as music. In a salon, people will neglect the painter to pet and coddle the musician: in truth, one does not always think of dancing and singing.

The quadrille was only half through when the two lamps went out once more. The last two figures were

danced in a half light, or rather in semi-darkness. Everybody laughed while Madame Giraud scolded her husband, and he exclaimed:

“Faith! I give it up, I am wasting my time. Théodore, tell the maid to bring more candles.”

Théodore left the salon, but only to pay a visit to the sideboard in the dining-room. A third contradance was formed without any improvement in the light; it began, accompanied by the cries of Madame Giraud, still calling for more candles; by the lamentations of Giraud, who kept raising and lowering the wicks of his lamps to no purpose; by the howling of the three children who were quarrelling over the sweetmeats, and by the barking of the dog, who escorted all the departing guests to the door, yelping at their heels.

Bélan, who was dancing opposite the stout party, paid little heed to the noise and thought only of performing his figures; but the semi-darkness which reigned in the salon prevented him from seeing a slice of orange which Monsieur Théodore had dropped from his pocket; as he tried to execute a slide, Bélan slid in good earnest, and fell between the legs of his vis-à-vis.

The ladies shrieked with terror. Bélan rose, holding his side and swearing that he would not have fallen if he had not trodden upon something. The little Giraud girl picked up the crushed slice of orange and cried:

“It was my brother who threw that on the floor.”

And the father left the salon, giving Bélan his word that his son should be punished when everybody had gone.

That contradance was the last; the candles threatened to follow the example of the lamps, and the dancers were afraid of falling in with slices of orange when they balanced their partners.

Everybody departed. I went downstairs at the same time as Mademoiselle Dumeillan and her mother. I offered the latter my hand, while looking at the daughter only; I assisted them into a cab and bowed. That was as far as I could go at a first meeting.

I heard someone laughing and humming behind me. It was Bélan, following the lady in black and her husband; as he passed he whispered in my ear:

"I am following her, it's all right. As for La Montdidier, that is all over, it's broken off, we are sworn enemies. Adieu, I must pursue my conquest."

A moment later Montdidier and his wife passed, accompanied by a tall, fair-haired youth who had stood behind madame's chair all the evening.

I smiled as I remembered Bélan's purpose to be virtuous, and I could not forbear exclaiming:

"Oh! these men! these women!"

IV

A PAIR OF LOVERS

I lived on Rue Meslay, in a large house where there were apartments for all sorts of persons, even for those who had no money; and where, consequently, the man who passed the night working to earn his living used the same staircase as the man who passed the night amusing himself; the only difference was that the former went up higher. But even under the eaves there are pleasures and love and some very charming faces. The man who knows how to find them is not afraid to go up rather high.

I knew that there were at the top of my house—that is to say, of the house where I lived—some small, unplastered rooms, with cracks in the walls and loose doors and windows, where the chimneys smoked, where one froze in winter, where the rats and mice came every night to visit the occupants, and which, none the less, the landlord let for the highest price that he could obtain; however, he would not accept everybody as a tenant, but insisted upon having none but quiet people. I had never been up to inspect those little rooms. It was not for lack of inclination, however, for I had met several times on my staircase a very pretty girl, who, as I knew, occupied one of the most modest apartments on the fifth floor. She had not the aspect of a common working girl, nor had she the wide-awake air of a grisette, and yet she was almost that, for she worked for her living. She made wreaths, so the concierge told me, and mended linen when people chose to give her any to mend. But she seemed so young that she inspired little confidence in the people to whom she went to ask for work; and yet one may be quite as honest at sixteen years as at forty. Honesty is in the blood; when one must look to time and experience for it, it is never built on a very solid foundation.

Little Marguerite had not been able to obtain a room in the house without difficulty. The landlord considered her too young and did not want to let a room to her; he was surprised that she should have quarters of her own so early. But the girl had a certain air of candor which disarmed the landlord's sternness; she swore that she was very quiet, that she made no noise and never stayed out late; and he let a room to her for a hundred and thirty francs a year. It was necessary to make many wreaths to earn that amount.

Despite her innocent air, Mademoiselle Marguerite had a lover; but when a girl has but one, when she receives only him and goes out only with him, she is justified in saying that she is quiet, and even honest. Honesty does not consist solely in innocence. I once had a maid who was absolutely virtuous, and who stole my cravats.

I knew nothing of all these details when I first met the girl on the stairway. When I saw those small features that indicated that she was barely fifteen, those great light-blue eyes, that tiny mouth, that tiny figure—for, except her eyes, everything about Mademoiselle Marguerite seemed to be tiny—I made eyes at her, that is to say, I looked hard at her, and tried to make her look at me; but she paid no attention to my ogling and ran quickly down the stairs. Another time I ventured upon a few words, a compliment or two, but she did not reply; after that I ceased to ogle her or to speak to her, for I am not obstinate, and according to my belief, in order to please a woman one must please her at the outset.

Once, however, Mademoiselle Marguerite had rung at my door; when I found that she had come to pay me a visit, I did not know just what to think; but the girl, whose eyes were swollen with tears and who was sobbing pitifully, gave no thought to the impropriety of what she was doing. She came to ask me if I had seen her cat, which had disappeared that morning. On learning that I had not seen her poor Moquette, she darted away like an arrow, paying no heed to the consoling words which I attempted to offer her.

Thereupon I said to myself: "That is a virtuous girl; for I consider it virtuous to be faithful to her lover." I talked a little about her with my concierge, and what I learned confirmed me in my opinion.

"Yes, she is very quiet," said the concierge, "except when she is running after her cat, which she plays with as if she was only five years old. But after all, she is very young still. And she has a friend who is almost as young as she is. He's a very nice fellow, too. But they're as poor as Job! A room with nothing in it but a bed, and such a bed! four pieces of wood, which fall apart as soon as you touch 'em, a little sideboard that ain't worth more than fifteen sous, four chairs, a wash bowl and a little three-franc mirror; how can anyone get along with that? That's what Mademoiselle Marguerite calls her household! But still she pays her rent, and there's nothing to say."

"Her lover is a workman, I suppose, an apprentice?"

"No indeed! he's a dandy, a gentleman, in fact; but he seems to think that she's well enough off as she is, or else he can't do any better; and I give you my word that the girl eats potatoes oftener than anything else. But as long as she can see her Ernest and play with her cat, she's as happy as a queen."

Since I had known all this, I had regarded the girl with a friendly interest simply. Some time after, that interest became still greater. I overheard involuntarily a conversation between Mademoiselle Marguerite and an old count who lived on the same landing with me. Monsieur le comte was an old rake; there was nothing extraordinary in that; we are all rakes more or less. He, too, used to ogle our young neighbor, and one day, when I was about to go out, my door happened to be ajar, and the following dialogue reached my ears:

"Listen, listen, my pretty little minx; I have a couple of words to say to you."

"What are they, monsieur?"

"In the first place, that you are a sweetheart."

"Oh! if that's all, it is——"

"Listen, my dear love, I wish to make you happy."

"Happy? Why, I am very happy, monsieur."

"A girl can't be happy when she lives under the eaves, in a wretched, poorly-furnished chamber. I will give you a pretty apartment and money to buy whatever you want."

"What's that, monsieur? What do you take me for?"

"Come, come, Mademoiselle Marguerite, don't play the prude; when a girl has a lover, when she lives with a young man, she should not be so severe."

"Because I have a lover, monsieur, is that any reason why I should listen to such things?"

"Your little popinjay of a lover gives you nothing, and will drop you the first thing you know; whereas I will agree to give you an allowance, and, if you behave yourself, I——"

"I beg you to say no more, monsieur, and never speak to me again; if you do, I will tell Ernest that you called him a popinjay, and how you have been talking to me. Ah! he will teach you a lesson."

"What's that? You insolent, impertinent little hussy!"

"Bah! you old fool!"

And with that, the girl ran quickly upstairs. Monsieur le comte returned to his room grumbling, and I said to myself:

"She must really love her Ernest, since she prefers poverty with him to comfort with another;" and I was almost ashamed of having made some few sweet speeches to her, for, without being constant oneself, one may well do homage to constancy.

I was curious to see her lover; but probably he came early in the morning and went away late, or not at all.

One day, however, I met him; and I was surprised to find that I knew him; I had met him several times in society. He was a young man of excellent family, not more than twenty years old; he was a comely youth, but he had a mania for writing for the stage, and had not as yet succeeded in having any of his plays produced, except a few unimportant things at some of the boulevard theatres. His parents did not approve of his taste for the drama, and desired to force him to enter the government service; but he always found a way to delay until the place was filled; and his parents, who were not at all satisfied with him, gave him very little pocket money. Poor fellow! I understood why his little mistress had potatoes oftener than quail.

I knew him only by his family name; I did not know that his name was Ernest. When we met on the stairs, he smiled and we bowed. I did not try to stop him, he always went up so rapidly. I understood that he was more anxious to be up there with her than to talk with me.

It was a long time since I had met Marguerite and her young lover. On returning from Giraud's party, I noticed much commotion in my concierge's lodge; the husband and wife were both up, although it was after midnight, and one of them was ordinarily in bed by eleven o'clock. An old cook who lived in the house was also in their lodge; they were talking earnestly and I overheard these words:

"She is very ill; the midwife shook her head, and that's a very bad sign."

"Who is very ill?" I asked, as I took my candle.

"Why, monsieur, it's little Marguerite; she has had a miscarriage."

"What! was that poor child enceinte?"

"You don't mean to say that you haven't noticed it, monsieur? She was four and a half months gone."

"Is not Monsieur Ernest with her?"

"Oh! he is like a madman. He has just gone home; it's only a few steps away. He took our little nephew with him, so as to bring something back with him probably; for there ain't anything at all upstairs."

At that moment there was a loud knocking at the gate. Someone opened it and Ernest came into the courtyard with a mattress on his head; the young man had not hesitated to endanger his fine clothes by doing the work of a porter; when it is a question of helping the woman one loves, such things are not considered. Moreover, at midnight, the streets are not crowded.

The little nephew came behind, bringing an armchair covered with Utrecht velvet; I saw that young Ernest, without the knowledge of his parents, had despoiled his own chamber in order to provide his young friend with a little furniture.

"It is high time that you came back, monsieur," said the concierge, with that alarming manner which heightens the effect of bad news. "Mademoiselle Marguerite is very sick; there's complications. In fact, she is losing all her blood, and you know it can't go on long that way."

The young man uttered a cry of dismay, and throwing the mattress to the ground, ran up the stairs four at a time, without stopping to listen to anything more. I remained in front of the concierges' lodge, both of them being too old and too lazy to offer to carry up the mattress; as for the little nephew, it was all that he could do to climb up with the chair, and the cook was there solely to gossip. I soon made up my mind: I took the mattress on my shoulders and I went up with it to the fifth floor.

I reached the door of little Marguerite's bedroom. It was not locked, and yet I dared not go in. I knew that the girl was so poor; and one should be especially careful when dealing with poor people. Perhaps she and her lover would be offended to think that I had ventured to come up. And yet, since she was so ill——

While I was hesitating, standing at the door with the mattress on my shoulders, I heard a shrill voice say:

"Send for a doctor, monsieur; I won't be responsible; you must have a doctor, she needs one very bad."

A very weak voice, which I recognized as the young girl's, said:

"Stay here, Ernest, don't leave me. I feel better when you are here."

I pushed the door open and dropped the mattress in a corner of the room, saying:

"I will go out and call a doctor; stay with her, as it does her good."

"Oh! yes, yes, do go," said Ernest; "oh! how grateful I shall be to you!"

I heard no more; I descended the stairs rapidly and nearly overturned the concierge's little nephew, who had only reached the third floor with his chair; I believe that the little rascal sat down on it at every landing. At last I was in the street; I ran at random, looking about for some shop that was still open, where I could inquire if there was a doctor in the neighborhood.

Where should I apply? Everybody was in bed; I saw many midwives' signs, but a midwife was not what I wanted. I ventured to ring at several doors; I jerked the bells and made an infernal noise.

"Who is there?" the concierges asked me; and I shouted:

"Isn't there a doctor in the house?"

They answered me with abuse, or not at all; people are not polite when they want to sleep.

I knew two doctors, but they lived so far away that the poor child would have time to die before they could get to her. What was I to do? I did not wish to return alone. I was tempted to cry fire. That method, which has been employed in several plays, might serve in real life as well; one always has to frighten one's fellow-citizens, to obtain anything from them. Then, when everybody had come to the windows, I would call for a doctor.

I was about to give the alarm, when two men passed me, talking with great earnestness. I recognized Ernest's voice; it was he, in fact; fearing that I would not return quickly enough, he had followed me; but he had thought to ask the nurse for the address of a doctor, and he had found one. I ran after him, and he thanked me, although I had been of no service to him. We returned, walking rapidly, without speaking; poor Ernest had but one thought, to save his little Marguerite. We arrived. Ernest went up to his mistress with the surgeon. I remained in the hall, going upstairs and down in my excitement. I had simply said to Ernest:

"If you need anything, I shall be here."

How long the minutes seemed to me! Those young lovers loved each other so dearly! the poor girl was so sweet! if she should die, how her lover would grieve for her and regret her! To lose such a long future of happiness! Ah! Death goes sadly astray when it closes eyes of sixteen years.

It seemed to me that an hour had passed since the doctor went up. But I heard steps coming down, and someone called me; it was Ernest. Joy gleamed in his eyes, and he cried:

"My friend, my friend, she is saved; there is no more danger!"

"Ah! I am so glad to hear it!"

We shook hands. He had called me his friend, and a few hours earlier we had hardly known each other; but there are events which bind two people more closely than sixty evenings passed together in society. It was one of those events which had happened to us.

The surgeon came downstairs and Ernest ran to meet him.

"Are you going, monsieur? Then she is out of danger?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, have no fear; everything is all right now, and as it should be; I will answer for her; all she needs now is rest."

"But you will come to-morrow morning, won't you, monsieur?"

"Yes, I will come to see her to-morrow."

With that the doctor went away and Ernest followed him to the street door, gazing at him, and listening to him as to an oracle. Ah! that is a noble art which gives us the means of saving the lives of our fellowmen. The man who has saved the life of a person whom we love ceases to be a man in our eyes, and becomes a god.

I was about to go to my room, but Ernest said to me:

"Come up with me a moment; it will please her."

I followed him. The girl was lying in her bed, which in truth did not seem to be very soft; however she had, in addition to her ordinary bed, the mattress that her lover had brought. The midwife was seated in the arm-chair, the magnificence of which was in striking contrast to the few pieces of furniture with which the room was supplied; she had her feet on a foot-warmer, although she was sitting directly in front of the fireplace; to be

sure, the fire was a very modest one. There was nothing about the woman to indicate sensibility; one could see that she was there to practise her profession and that was all; and from her unamiable expression and the glances that she cast about her, I could see that the poverty of the room made her apprehensive that she would not be well paid for her services; however, she had agreed to pass the night there, and the young man was very grateful to her.

Ernest walked very softly to the bed; but the girl instantly held out her hand to him, saying:

"Oh! I am not asleep, I have no desire to sleep; but I am very comfortable now. The only thing is that I am afraid it will tire you to sit up all night; you are just getting over a sickness yourself, and you are not strong yet. Go home; you know that I am out of danger; the doctor said so, and since madame will stay——"

"Oh, yes, I will stay," said the midwife, in a sour tone, "although it puts me out; but still—great heaven! how cold it is in this room! the wind blows everywhere. A fine fire that! just two sticks! ain't there even a pair of bellows here?"

Ernest hastily fetched the bellows, and handed them to the woman; then he returned to the bed, saying:

"You must know, my love, that I shall not leave you. But here is Monsieur Blémont, who was good enough to go out to call a doctor, when he came up an hour ago; we haven't so much as thought of thanking him."

"Ah! that is true, my dear.—I beg pardon, monsieur, pray excuse me; but I was in such pain then——"

"You owe me no thanks, for it was not I who found your doctor."

"No matter," said Ernest, "you showed some interest in us, and I shall never forget it."

"What a miserable pair of bellows! Not two sous' worth of wind! it must be pleasant here in freezing weather!"

I turned toward the woman; I should have liked to impose silence upon her, for it seemed to me that her indiscreet remarks must be painful to the two lovers. But I was mistaken; they were not listening to her. Ernest was holding his darling's hand, and she was gazing lovingly into his eyes; after their fear of an eternal separation, it seemed to them that they had recovered each other. They were entirely absorbed in their love. But Marguerite sighed, and after a moment I heard her whisper to Ernest:

"What a pity, my dear! it was a boy!"

Poor child! although hardly able to keep herself alive, she wanted a child, because every woman is proud to be a mother, and a child is an additional bond between her and her lover.

I was about to leave them when there was a loud noise outside; it was a crash of broken glass, and it seemed to be on the roof near the window of the chamber in which we were.

The midwife uttered a cry of terror, and ran behind me, exclaiming:

"It's thieves! did you hear, monsieur? They're coming in the window. We must rouse the whole house."

I confess that I shared the opinion of the nurse, and I was about to open the window to see what was afoot, when Marguerite, who, instead of showing signs of alarm, had smiled faintly, motioned to me to stop, and said to us:

"Don't be alarmed, I know what it is; I am used to that noise now; it is my neighbor, Monsieur Pettermann, going into his room."

"Who on earth is Monsieur Pettermann, and why does he make such a noise going into his room?" asked the midwife.

"Monsieur Pettermann is a tailor, and works in his room; but he gets drunk at least three times a week; on those days he always loses his door key; then he climbs out on the gutter under the window of the landing and crawls along, at the risk of breaking his neck, to his own window, puts his fist through a pane so that he can throw back the catch, and gets into his room that way. Ask Ernest if we haven't heard him do it more than a dozen times."

I could not help laughing at Monsieur Pettermann's habits, while the nurse exclaimed:

"Oh! the idiot! he gave me a fright. The idea of walking on a gutter! and when he is drunk, too!"

"If he was sober, madame, he probably wouldn't take the risk."

"But some day this neighbor of yours will break his neck."

"So I have often told him. The day after, when he has his window mended, he swears that it shall never happen again. The concierge has already threatened to warn him out if he doesn't enter by his door, and doesn't come home earlier."

At that moment we heard someone storming and swearing on the landing. Monsieur Pettermann, having entered his room, had succeeded in opening his door, which was fastened only by a spring lock.

"Perhaps he wants a light," said Marguerite; "it very seldom happens that he asks me for anything; but he may have seen that we haven't gone to bed here."

We heard a knock at the door, and a hoarse voice stutted:

"I say, neighbor, haven't you g—g—gone to bed, n—n—neighbor? What would you s—s—say if I should ask you to l—l—light my little c—c—candle-end?"

I was curious to see neighbor Pettermann, and before Ernest had had time to drop Marguerite's hand, I opened the door.

The tailor was still young, with a frank, honest face; but the habit of drinking too much had made his nose purple and swollen, and his dress was marked by a lack of order which also betrayed his intemperance.

On seeing me, he opened his eyes and said:

"Hello! have I made a mistake? This is funny. Ain't this my neighbor's door, or has she moved?"

"No, monsieur," said Ernest, "but don't shout so loud; she is sick. What do you want?"

"Ah! she is sick, is she, poor little woman!" And Monsieur Pettermann walked toward the bed, saying: "Are you sick, my little woman? What's the matter with you?"

Ernest stopped the tailor, who was reeking with liquor; and he, always very polite, although tipsy, fearing that he had done something wrong, stepped back to the arm-chair in which the midwife was seated, and sank upon her lap, saying:

"I beg pardon, that's so; it's none of my business. Ah! prout!"

"Will you get up?" cried the nurse, striking the tailor in the back. He turned about, stammering:

"Ah! I was sitting on one of the fair sex, although I hadn't a suspicion of it.—Excuse me, my little woman, I didn't do it on purpose, I swear."

"Give me your candle and let me light it for you," said Ernest; "for that is what you want, I have no doubt."

"Yes, neighbor, if you would be so kind. I couldn't use my flint because I scratched my right hand a little, while getting into my room."

Not until then did we notice that the poor fellow's right hand was covered with blood, two of his fingers being badly cut. The girl pointed to a closet in which there were some rags, with which Ernest hastily bandaged the tailor's hand. He made no objection, but said:

"Oh, *mon Dieu*! it's nothing at all, a trifle. I don't know what was the matter to-night, but I broke two panes instead of one."

"But Monsieur Pettermann, don't you ever propose to give up your habit of going into your room through the window?"

"What would you have me do? I lose my key—these keys slip out of your pocket without your knowing it, and besides, I believe my pocket has a hole in it. But I promise you that I'll look after it now, especially as it is going to be hard for me to sew it up."

"Here's your candle."

"Many thanks. Good-night all. Better health to you, neighbor. If you ever need my services, call on me; don't hesitate."

"Thanks, thanks, Monsieur Pettermann."

"No, don't hesitate; call me; it will be a pleasure to me."

The tailor returned to his room. I thought that the young invalid must have need of rest, so I too left the room after wishing them good-night. But I wanted to say something to Ernest alone. He escorted me downstairs with the light. When we were both in front of my door, I stopped and looked at him, and I held my peace; for I really did not know how to broach the subject.

Ernest, who did not suspect that I wished to say anything to him, wished me good-night and was about to go upstairs. I caught his arm to detain him; I felt that I must make up my mind to speak.

"Monsieur Ernest, I am delighted to have become better acquainted with you; I hope that our acquaintance will not stop here."

"I thank you, monsieur. I hope so too. I tell you again that I shall not forget your interest in my grief to-night. There are so many people who would have laughed at my distress, and who would have blamed it."

"Such people never see in love-affairs anything more than momentary pleasure; the moment any pain enters into them, they think they should be broken off."

"Ah, yes! you are quite right. But good-night, I must go."

"One moment more. I wanted to say to you—First of all, I pray you, excuse me; I trust that what I am going to say will not offend you. Young men can afford to speak frankly. Although I am five or six years older than you, I remember very well that when I was eighteen, and was still living with my parents, I was sometimes sorely embarrassed to give presents to my mistress. Now listen: your young friend has met with an accident that will entail expenses which you did not expect so soon. A young man who lives with his parents is sometimes short of money. Allow me to offer you my purse. You can repay me when you are able."

Ernest shook my hand warmly as he replied:

"I thank you for your offer, Monsieur Blémont; it does not offend me, for I do not consider it a crime to be short of money, and I will not make a pretence of being well supplied with it, for that would give you a poor idea of my heart, after seeing that poor child's bedroom.

My parents are well-to-do, as you know; but they treat me very harshly, because I do not do absolutely what they would like. They think also that at my age, a young man should not want to spend money upon a mistress. Perhaps they are not wrong, after all. I assure you, however, that the privations which Marguerite and I suffer, far from lessening our love, do in fact increase it. Should we not become attached to a person in proportion to what she has suffered for our sake? Marguerite is so young and so pretty, that, if she chose, she could have wealthy lovers with whom she would enjoy all the luxuries of life; she prefers to remain poor with me. But we are not to be pitied for that, for we love each other better than money. However, this embarrassment will only be temporary, I hope; I have two plays accepted, and if they are successful——”

“Then you accept my offer?”

“Oh, no! I never borrow money when I am not certain of being able to return it. That is a principle from which I shall never depart.”

“But when you have plays accepted, which are going to be produced——”

“A play is never a certainty; it is a cast of the dice. I thank you a thousand times; but I have something left with which to face the present. As for the future, we will hope, we will build castles in the air.”

“I am sorry that you refuse.”

“And I am very glad that you have made the offer, for you are the first one of my friends to suggest anything of that sort, and yet you have been my friend for only a few hours.”

“It is a fact that one often passes his life with people to whom he gives the name of friends, but who have none of the feelings of a friend.”

"Good-night, Monsieur Blémont. If you have time to come up for a moment to-morrow, we shall be glad to see you."

"Yes, I will come to enquire for my neighbor. Good-night."

Ernest went up to the fifth floor and I went into my room.

V

LOVE AGAIN

I went next day to visit my neighbor on the fifth floor and found her alone with her lover; the midwife was no longer there; Ernest had taken her place, no less from inclination than from necessity; for the lovers were happier not to have a third person with them all day, and what would be a privation to others is a satisfaction to lovers.

Ernest was seated beside his friend's bed; I was afraid that I was in the way, and I intended to remain only a moment, but my visit lasted more than an hour. "Pray don't go yet," they said every time that I rose to take my leave. Why was it that the time passed so quickly, that we got along so well together? It was because we all three allowed our real sentiments to appear, because we talked freely of the things that interested us, and because we poured out our hearts without reserve. Marguerite spoke of the child that she hoped for, and her eyes, fastened on Ernest's, seemed to say to him:

"We can make up for this lost time, can we not?"

Ernest smiled and spoke encouragingly to her; then talked about his two plays that had been accepted; they were his children, too. For my part, I talked to them of the theatre, balls, and love-affairs. I told them, without mentioning any names, the adventure of Bélan and Hélène. That made them laugh heartily. I was not aware that I spoke with more interest of Mademoiselle Dumeillan than of others; but when I mentioned her name, I noticed that Mademoiselle Marguerite smiled and that Ernest did the same.

At last, after one of my anecdotes, Ernest said to me:

"My dear Monsieur Blémont, I should say that you were in love."

"In love! I! with whom, pray?"

"Parbleu! with the fair-haired young lady who talks so well, who plays the piano so charmingly, who has such a sweet expression."

"What! Have I said so to you?"

"No, but we guessed it from the way in which you talked of her; didn't we, Marguerite?"

"Yes, yes; you are certainly in love with the young lady in pink."

"Oh! I give you my word that——"

"Don't swear, monsieur; you would not tell the truth."

"Mademoiselle Eugénie is very pretty, it is true; but I hardly know her."

"Acquaintance is easily made."

"I do not know whether those ladies would care to receive me. By the way, what you say suggests to me the idea of going to see Monsieur Giraud and talking with him about it. Perhaps he won't be fussing over his lamps to-day. I think that I will go there; I will lead the conversation to the subject of those ladies, as if unpremeditated."

“That is right: go; then you must come back and tell us how you progress.”

I confess that the devoted love of those two young people made me long to enjoy a similar happiness. Perhaps the thought of the charming Eugénie had much influence upon my reflections. I was twenty-six years old, and I was already weary of commonplace love-affairs. Still it is very amusing to have three or four mistresses and to deceive them all, at the same time; to have them make a row, follow you, watch you, threaten you, and become more passionately enamored of you with each infidelity. And the poor husbands that you make—Oh! they are most amusing too! But amid all such enjoyments, it seemed to me that my heart was sometimes conscious of a void. Did not Ernest and Marguerite enjoy a more genuine happiness than I? I did not know, but I proposed to try it and find out.

I had eight thousand francs a year. That is not a fortune, but it is a competence. Moreover, I had gone through the regular course of study and had been admitted to be an advocate; that was something; to be sure, I had not tried many cases since I had been entitled to wear the gown. Pleasure had too often diverted my thoughts from my profession; but if I married, I should be more virtuous; indeed, I should have to be.

My father was dead; he also had been at the bar. He left me an honorable name, which I made it my pride to keep without stain; for one may have three or four mistresses at once without impairing one's honor; especially when one has neither violence nor seduction with which to reproach oneself; and God be praised! we live in an age when it is easy to make love without resorting to such methods. I know very well that it is not strictly moral to deceive husbands. But example is so

contagious! and then there are so many of those gentry who neglect their wives! Is it not natural to console them?

My mother, who passed her summers in the country, and her winters in Paris at a whist table, would certainly be very glad to have me married; she had three thousand francs a year which would come to me some day; but I never thought of that; when one loves one's parents, one must always hope that they will not die.

I indulged in these reflections, I could not say why. After all, I had no purpose of marrying, or at all events of entering into one of those marriages which are arranged beforehand by parents or friends. If I married, I should have to be very deeply in love, and to be absolutely certain that I was dearly loved in return.

As I walked along, musing thus, I reached Giraud's door. Should I go upstairs? Why not? I would pretend that I had lost a cane, a switch, the night before. I never carried one, but no matter. It was two o'clock, and I thought that Giraud would be in his office. I went up, and found the door on the landing open. The three children, dressed like little thieves, and as dirty as rag-pickers, were in the reception room, playing with the dog, on whose head they had put their father's black silk night-cap. I noticed that the rooms had not been put to rights. The maid was sweeping the salon, and told me that Giraud was at home. I supposed that he was in his office; but the little girl called out to me that her papa was dressing her mamma, and I dared not venture to enter Madame Giraud's chamber. Someone went to call monsieur and I waited in the dust, pursued by the broom.

At last Giraud appeared, wringing his hands and making wry faces.

"Good-morning, my dear Blémont."

"I am distressed to have disturbed you; I came up as I was passing, to——"

"You do not disturb me in the least; on the contrary, you have put an end to my sufferings. I was doing my utmost to fasten my wife's dress. Ah! my thumbs! heavens! how they ache! I couldn't succeed in doing it, and yet she pretends that her dress is too big; I don't believe a word of it. Françoise, go and fasten my wife's dress."

"But, monsieur, you know very well that madame says I go about it awkwardly, that I'm not strong enough."

"Never mind, go; you can finish the salon afterward."

I supposed that we should go into his office and that we should find a fire there, for it was not warm; but Giraud invited me to sit down on the couch, saying:

"I don't take you into my office, because it hasn't been put to rights yet. Lord! how my thumbs ache!—But we can talk as well here; the fire will be lighted as soon as the salon is swept. Is it late? I haven't found time to dress yet."

"Why, it is after two o'clock."

"Mon Dieu! and I have three appointments for this afternoon, to interview people who want to be married."

"I do not wish to detain you."

"Don't go; they must wait for me. In truth, nothing is ever done here.—My friend, marriage is a very fine thing! I hope that you will soon take your place in the class of respectable married men."

"Oh! I have time enough."

"You must be tired of a bachelor's life?"

"No, indeed."

"Did you see anyone at my party yesterday who interested you? Come, tell me about it."

"Oh, no! that isn't what brings me here; but I thought that perhaps I left a pretty little stick of mine last night."

"A stick! you must ask the children about that; they are the ones who find everything that is left here. They are as smart as little demons.—Théodore, Alexandre, daughter——"

"Oh, don't disturb them."

"Yes, yes; I am not sorry to have you see them, they are so cunning in their answers."

I dared not say that I had already seen the cunning creatures. Their papa continued to call them. Théodore appeared on all fours, carrying Alexandre on his back, the latter having the dog in his arms. The better to imitate a horse, Théodore had put on long paper ears, and the little girl was whipping him behind with a bunch of quills.

I laughed at the picture, and Giraud considered it very amusing at first. But in a moment he recognized his black silk cap on the dog's head, and he did not laugh any more.

"What, you rascals! you have taken my silk cap to put on Azor!"

"I did it to make a Croquemitaine of him, papa."

"I have forbidden you a hundred times to touch any of my things.—And you, mademoiselle, what are you whipping your brother with?"

"Papa, with——"

"With a bunch of quills that was on my desk—very expensive quills, rooster's quills, which I keep to write my circulars with. Who gave you leave to touch anything on my desk? But just come here, Monsieur Théodore. What did you make those ears with?"

"With a paper that was on the floor, papa."

"On the floor! God bless me! it is Monsieur Mer-millon's letter, in which he tells me in detail what his daughter's dowry will be! You little villain! to make horse's ears with my letters! Some day he will take thousand-franc notes from my desk to make horns with. I will deal with you, young man."

Giraud started to run after his son, but I stopped him; I heard madame calling in an angry voice:

"Giraud! Giraud! aren't you coming to finish dressing me? Françoise doesn't know how to fasten my dress; that girl is frightfully awkward."

"There, there it is," said Giraud; "she is going to send her back again because she don't fasten her dress quickly enough. It is always the same story. Faith, I don't care, let her fix herself! Just look at my thumbs; I haven't any flesh left round my nails."

Someone half opened the bedroom door; Madame Giraud stood at the entrance half dressed, and behind her came the maid, who resumed her broom, muttering:

"Ah! what a dog's life! as if I came here to squeeze her waist in!"

At sight of me, Madame Giraud took one step backward, then three forward, and exclaimed:

"Oh! pray excuse my disorderly appearance, Monsieur Blémont, but Monsieur Giraud is a terrible man; he never finishes dressing me! But I can't remain half dressed. I give you my word, monsieur, that this dress is too big for me."

"And I give you my word, wife, that my thumbs are sore."

"Bah! you are a tender creature; and I have three calls to make before dinner, and you know that we dine at Madame Dumeillan's, who has a box at the Porte-Saint-Martin."

"That is so, we dine out. Just imagine, my dear Blémont, that we have so many invitations that we don't know which to accept."

"They dine early too. Oh dear! how unfortunate I am! I shall never be ready in time."

Madame Giraud had said enough for me. Delighted by what I had learned, I walked toward her.

"If you will allow me, madame, perhaps I may be more successful than your maid."

Madame Giraud smiled most graciously at me and instantly turned her back, saying:

"How kind you are, Monsieur Blémont! What, do you really mean that you——?"

"With great pleasure, madame."

I was not a novice at fastening dresses; I took the belt on each side, and although I hurt my fingers a little, the dress was fastened; and I did it as if it had cost me no effort at all.

"That's the way," cried Madame Giraud triumphantly; "that's the way; isn't it, Monsieur Blémont?"

"Yes, madame; it's all right now."

"There, Monsieur Giraud, you see. When one knows how—and monsieur did not seem to make any effort."

"No, madame, none at all."

"Faith, my dear fellow," said Giraud, "if you will come here every day when madame is dressing, you will do me a great favor."

"Hush, Monsieur Giraud; you ought to be ashamed. —Excuse me, Monsieur Blémont; I must go and finish dressing. A thousand thanks."

Madame returned to her room, and Giraud invited me to sit down in a corner of the salon that had been swept; but I took my hat and bade him adieu; he escorted me as far as the landing, saying:

"My friend, marry. Believe me, it is the happiest state. I have three superb matches at your disposal."

"All right, we will see."

"If your stick is found, I will put it away."

"Oh! I am inclined to think, after all, that I didn't leave it here. Adieu."

So Mademoiselle Eugénie would be at the Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre that evening. The Girauds would be with them, so I should have an excuse for going to pay my respects to them. And yet those Girauds were so stupid, so ridiculous, with their mania for marrying everybody; I was sorry to find that they were intimate with those ladies. But perhaps it was only a society intimacy; one of those in which people call on one another merely to pass the time, but do not care for one another.

I awaited the evening not too impatiently, for I was not in love. I desired to see the young woman again because I had nothing better to do, and because my eyes, fatigued by feigning love so long, ached to rest upon other charms in order to recover a little of the fire which they had lost.

I went to the theatre late, for I desired that they should be there when I arrived. I cast my eyes over the boxes, and I discovered the ladies in an open box on the first tier. The mother and Madame Giraud were in front, Mademoiselle Eugénie on the second bench. I did not see Giraud; probably he had some marriage to arrange that evening. There was a vacant seat beside Mademoiselle Eugénie. Did I dare? But the box was theirs and I could not presume to go in; it was essential that I should be invited.

The young woman seemed to me even prettier than the night before. Her simpler gown and headdress added

to her charms. She did not see me, so I was able to scrutinize her at my leisure. There was a seat in a box near theirs; should I take it? No, that would be showing my desire to speak to them too plainly.

The performance had begun. They did not see me, although I had drawn nearer to them. Madame Giraud was entirely engrossed by her figure. I was sure that she was suffocating. She did not know enough to look in my direction.

Someone opened the door of their box,—Giraud, no doubt. No, it was a young man; he saluted the ladies and Mademoiselle Dumeillan smiled upon him; she talked and laughed with him! It was well worth while for me to go there to see that! *Mon Dieu!* how stupid a man can be! I was jealous, and all on account of a person whom I hardly knew, and to whom I had not said a word of love. Was not that young woman at liberty to have a lover, ten lovers indeed, if she chose? I blushed at my folly, and to prove to myself that she was absolutely indifferent to me, I went at once to the box next to hers, for I did not see why the presence of those ladies, who were almost strangers to me, should prevent me from talking with Madame Giraud, whose dress I had fastened that morning.

I entered the box. I did not look at Mademoiselle Eugénie; indeed, I pretended not to see the ladies. But in a moment Madame Giraud called to me:

“Good-evening, Monsieur Blémont. How kind of you to come to see us! So you remembered that I said that I was coming here to-night with these ladies?”

The devil take Madame Giraud with her memory! I replied very deliberately:

“No, madame, I did not know, I had no idea—but I agreed to meet somebody here; that is why I came.”

Then I bowed coldly to Madame Dumeillan and her daughter, after which I turned and looked at the audience. But Madame Giraud soon began again to talk to me; she was inclined to overwhelm me with marks of friendliness since I had succeeded in fastening her dress.

I pretended to listen to Madame Giraud, but I had no idea of what she was saying. I was listening to the young man who was talking to Mademoiselle Eugénie. His remarks were very vague; he had nothing particular to say to her, and talked about nothing but the play. I felt that my ill humor was vanishing. I turned toward the ladies and joined in the conversation, but I did not rest my eyes on Mademoiselle Eugénie. I should have been sorry that she should think that I had come there on her account.

Before long the young man took leave of the ladies and returned to his party. He left her; did that mean that he was not in love with her? I cast a furtive glance at Mademoiselle Dumeillan. After that young man's departure she was as light-hearted and seemed to enjoy herself as much as when he was there. I began to think that I was mistaken and that he was not a lover.

Thereupon I moved close to their box, and during the performance I exchanged a few words with Mademoiselle Eugénie. Once my hand touched hers, which was resting on the rail that separated us; the contact was a mere chance; our two hands touched, she hastily withdrew hers, and I did the same, faltering some words of apology. But that lovely hand when it touched mine caused me a thrill of delicious emotion. A simple touch produced such an effect as that! I would have liked to know if Mademoiselle Eugénie—but she was not looking in my direction.

In the next intermission, Madame Giraud, who was talking with Madame Dumeillan, suddenly turned to me and said:

"By the way, madame, Monsieur Blémont is a lawyer; he knows all about the laws, and what rights people have. My husband isn't very well posted in such matters; his forte is marriages. Consult Monsieur Blémont about your business; he will tell you whether you are in the right or not."

"I should not dare to annoy monsieur," replied the mother, "or presume to take his time."

I eagerly offered my services and asked what the business was; but she could not explain it to me at the theatre; it was necessary for me to look over documents and title deeds. That was just what I hoped. Madame Dumeillan gave me her address, and, while renewing her apologies for the trouble I was about to take, thanked me in advance for calling upon her some morning. She thanked me for something which I would eagerly have asked as a favor! How happy I was! But I succeeded in concealing my delight. I did not again put my hand near Mademoiselle Dumeillan's; it was especially essential then that I should be careful not to act like a man in love. A novice throws himself at people's heads, but a clever man knows how to husband his privileges.

Acting upon this principle, when Giraud arrived I paid my respects to the ladies and left the theatre. Had I remained I should have seemed to be looking for an opportunity to escort them home.

VI

I GO TO THE HOUSE

The next day arrived and I hesitated about calling upon the two ladies. Would it not be showing too much eagerness? No, it would be no more than polite; since they chose to have confidence in my talent, I ought not to keep them waiting.

I waited until the clock struck two; then I went to Madame Dumeillan's. The condition of affairs there was not the same as at Giraud's. The maid had finished sweeping the rooms. The one who admitted me ushered me into a room decorated without display, but with taste; there was a good fire and I found the young lady of the house practising upon the piano.

Mademoiselle Eugénie left her music to inform her mother of my arrival; I dared not tell her that it was on her account alone that I had come; that would have been going too fast. What a pity it is that one cannot go straight to one's goal. How much time we waste!

The mother appeared. After the first salutations she explained her business to me and showed me her papers. Eugénie left the salon while her mother was talking to me; and it was well that she did, for I was listening distractedly, and I think that I answered incoherently. After she had gone I was all attention. The mother's business concerned a small farm which had descended to her husband, and her possession of which was

disputed by his brother-in-law. Her right seemed to me incontestable; but I could not read all the papers at once. She thought it quite natural for me to take them away in order to study them at home.

Eugénie returned and we talked of less serious things. The mother was very agreeable; Eugénie was bright and well informed, and although I had not yet become intimate with them, I was already on very good terms with them. After an hour's visit, I took my leave; I did not need to ask permission to call again, for I had a foothold in the house.

I did not go to Madame Dumeillan's again for two days. I am a peculiar man; I was determined to conceal my sentiments, and I should have been distressed to have Mademoiselle Eugénie suspect the impression that she had produced upon me. At last I made my second call. I had made a thorough study of the case in which the widow was threatened with a suit. I was persuaded that she was in the right; I so assured her and I offered my services to look after the matter, which I considered as already won. Madame Dumeillan was overjoyed; she thanked me and accepted my offer. I was no longer a stranger in the house; they seemed to look upon me as a friend.

The mother and daughter received much company; but they had one special reception day during the week. On that day there were cards and music and sometimes dancing. Their guests were more select than those one met at Giraud's; they were an entirely different set. And yet there were some whom I should have been glad not to see there; they were the young men, very attractive young men, who were attentive and devoted to Eugénie. How absurd I was! I had no objection to young women coming there, but as to men, I would have

liked to have none but bewigged heads. Those I found extremely agreeable.

For my own part, I think that I was not often agreeable. No one ever is when he is really in love. I liked to see the ladies in private; then I was much happier. If Eugénie played, there was no young man leaning over the piano, ready to turn the leaves for her. If I talked with her, we were not interrupted by some dandy coming to pay her a compliment; and yet I realized that they could not receive me and no one else.

I did not neglect the business that was entrusted to me; the prospect of winning the suit was doubly agreeable to me: I should oblige the ladies and I should give them a favorable opinion of my ability. It did not require much eloquence to succeed; madame triumphed over an adversary who had sued her because he had a mania for litigation. Only two months from the time of my first call, I had the pleasure of bringing the affair to a successful termination.

Although the property at stake was of no great value, Madame Dumeillan thanked me effusively; mothers think a great deal of money. Eugénie thanked me courteously, but that was all. As a general rule our relations were rather cool. Why did she not treat me as she did other men? Had she noticed that I was annoyed when men paid court to her, that I moved away when others approached? Did she not like my disposition? In truth she must have found me far from amiable. I was much less so than any of the other men who visited her mother. I never made any flattering remarks to her, I made no pretence of being devoted or gallant to her. Was that the way for me to succeed in making myself agreeable to her? Yes, I preferred that she should love me as I was! I wanted her to prove to me that she had read my heart,

and I did my utmost to conceal from her what was taking place in it! Love sometimes makes us very eccentric.

Sometimes I promised myself to change my manner toward Eugénie; I tried to do as the other young men did who came to her house: to be agreeable and gallant, to laugh and joke when others were about her; but I did not play my part well, my gayety was forced; Eugénie seemed to notice it, and that made me still more awkward.

The young men who were received at Madame Dumecillon's were all men of breeding; there was nothing in their attentions to Mademoiselle Eugénie which could offend the greatest stickler for propriety. Why then should I take offense? Because I could not be agreeable to her, was it any reason that others should not be? I realized that I was wrong; but I was determined to study and become thoroughly acquainted with Eugénie's character. I thought her a little inclined to flirt. In a girl of her age, and so pretty, that is very excusable; and besides, are not all women flirts? Yes, all, a little more or a little less; but it is a failing inherent in their nature. But is it a failing? Innocent coquetry is nothing more than a desire to please; that desire leads them to take more care with their dress, with the arrangement of their hair, with their whole personal appearance. What should we say of a woman who neglected all such things? We should blame her, or we should think that she had no taste. Why then should we call that a failing which is done to charm and fascinate us? By their education, by the place they fill in society, women are debarred from occupations in which they would be more successful perhaps than we are; from important negotiations, which they would untangle more quickly than many diplomats; and from political discussions, in which so many

men do not know what they are saying. We have left to women the simple and less arduous occupations of the household; but those occupations, even if they suffice to employ the time, can not furnish sufficient occupation for the mind and the imagination, to prevent them from seeking other employment. Some men think that a needle, an embroidery frame, or a piano ought to be enough to keep a woman busy. I do not think, like Cato, that wisdom and common sense are incompatible with the female mind; I believe that their intellects, their imaginations require other resources than a needle and a piano. They are forced to become coquettes because the desire to please is an employment which occupies the mind and gives it food for dreams; they would be much less coquettish if they were employed upon the same tasks that we are. And then there are so many degrees in coquetry! The sort of which I speak is perfectly natural, and perfectly legitimate for women. Eugénie had no other. She was fond of amusement, that was natural; and yet she never showed any disappointment when her mother declined an invitation to a ball. I was sure that she had an affectionate heart; her eyes sometimes had such a tender expression, and I had seen her shed tears at the performance of a sad play. But that was not sufficient proof that she would ever love passionately.

I was inclined to believe that she took no interest at all in me; she was most cold and reserved with me. She noticed doubtless that I followed her with my eyes, that I constantly watched her. I did not see the sense of going to a house to be dismal when others are merry, and perhaps to make oneself ridiculous. That thought made me blush for my weakness; self-esteem has so much influence on our hearts! I determined to think no more of Eugénie, and in order to forget her more

quickly I determined not to call at her mother's for a fortnight.

It was very hard for me to adhere to that resolution, for I had never passed more than two days without seeing her! However, a week passed, and I had kept my word; on the ninth day I reflected that Madame Dumeillan, who always was very friendly to me and always seemed to be very glad to see me, would think it strange that I had allowed so long a time to pass without calling. After all, if her daughter was cool to me, it was not that excellent lady's fault, and it should not make me discourteous to her. On the tenth day I decided to call there in the evening.

I did not select a reception day; however, I found some old acquaintances of Madame Dumeillan there who had come to play boston; two ladies and an old gentleman were playing with the mother, and Eugénie was alone, in a corner of the salon, embroidering.

Madame Dumeillan inquired with interest for my health; she had been afraid that I was ill and was intending to send to my apartment the next day. I thanked her, and apologized on the plea of a press of business; then I left the mother to her game and took a seat beside Eugénie.

She bowed coldly to me; she did not raise her eyes and addressed to me only the most trivial remarks; she was not even so polite as to reproach me for having allowed a long time to pass without calling. It seemed to me then that that young woman was as odious to me as she had been fascinating; if I had dared, I would have taken my hat and left the room instantly; but that would have been discourteous.

Ah! if we had loved each other, how much we should have found to say at that moment, when we were

practically alone in the salon, for no one paid any heed to us! But we must needs confine ourselves to exchanging a few meaningless words! Sometimes we were several minutes without speaking; she would not raise her eyes from her work. Ah! how I should have delighted to destroy that embroidery, which seemed to engross her so completely!

A half hour passed in this way. She continued to work with the same assiduity, and I was still beside her, saying little and sighing involuntarily. Suddenly the door of the salon opened; it was Monsieur Gerval, one of Eugénie's most persistent suitors, who often played and sang with her in the evening. This Gerval was a good-looking fellow and very agreeable; so that he was one of those whom I detested most heartily. I am sure that I changed color when he came in; I instantly felt an enormous weight settle down upon my chest. While Monsieur Gerval went to pay his respects to Madame Dumeillan, I walked quickly to the corner of the room where I had placed my hat; for I did not propose to stay a minute longer; I wished that I were a hundred leagues away; I was angry with myself for having come. I already had my hat in my hand and was on the point of leaving the room without a word to anyone, when a hand clasped mine, pressed it gently, and detained me; at the same moment Eugénie, for it was she, said to me in a tone which I had never before heard from her lips:

"Why are you going away? To pass a fortnight without coming and then go away like this! Really, I can't understand you. What have we done to you here, that you should stop coming?"

I stood like a statue. That soft voice, in which there was reproach and affection at the same time, that hand which still held mine, and those eyes which looked into

mine with a fascinating expression—all those things startled me, but also caused me a thrill of happiness hitherto unknown to me. One must have loved truly to understand all that I felt at that moment. I squeezed her hand frantically, and it returned the pressure; then she gently withdrew it, still looking at me. All this was the affair of a moment, but that moment decided the rest of my life. Eugénie loved me; she had read my heart, and I felt that I could not live without her, that Eugénie henceforth would be all in all to me.

I thought no more about going away. Eugénie returned to her seat and Gerval came to speak to her; but I was not jealous any more, Gerval had ceased to be offensive to me; it had required only an instant to change the whole current of my thoughts. I returned to Eugénie's side. While talking with Gerval, she succeeded in looking only at me. The young man suggested to her that they should sing together. She looked at me again, and seemed to ask me if that would be agreeable to me. I added my entreaties to Gerval's. She consented to go to the piano, but on her way there she passed close to me and our hands met. When she sang with Gerval a duet in which two lovers sing to each other of love, her eyes addressed to me the words that she sang. Ah! when two hearts understand each other, there are a thousand ways of proving it.

After that duet, Gerval proposed another; she declined on the ground of a sore throat, and returned to her seat by my side. Gerval remained for some time; it seemed to me that he was less merry, less sparkling that evening than usual. At last he said good-night and left.

I drew nearer to Eugénie; she still held her work, but she was not working; our eyes met often; we talked in undertones; I had so many things to say to her now,

and yet we exchanged only a few words; but our glances were more eloquent than our speech.

How rapidly the time passed! I was so happy with her! The card players finished their game, and Madame Dumeillan called to her daughter to give her her purse. The others were going away, and I must needs do the same.

"I hope that it will not be so long before you come again," said Madame Dumeillan kindly. And Eugénie, as she passed me, whispered:

"You will come to-morrow, won't you?"

My eyes alone answered, but she must have understood them; I saw a loving smile upon her lips. I went away, drunk with love and pleasure. I returned home hardly touching the ground. It seemed to me that my happiness bore me aloft and transported me to the third heaven,—that is to say, if there is a third heaven.

As I went upstairs, I thought of my young lovers on the fifth floor. I had neglected them sadly for some time! But I had been constantly depressed and jealous and in ill humor, and the picture of their love would simply have aggravated my suffering. Now I could safely go to see them. I should not be sad and gloomy with them, and they would understand my happiness.

It was only a quarter-past eleven, and I decided to see whether they had gone to bed. I went upstairs, knocked and mentioned my name; Ernest opened the door.

"Where on earth have you been?" he said, laughing; "it's a month since we've seen you."

"He has just come from his Eugénie," said little Marguerite. "Oh! how happy we look! It seems that our love-affair is progressing finely!"

"Yes, very well indeed. Ah! I am the happiest of men to-night! She loves me, I am sure of it now; she

prefers me to all the men who have made love to her; and yet I was much less attentive, much less agreeable than the others."

"What difference does that make? One is always agreeable when one is in love."

I told them all that had taken place that evening between Eugénie and me. They listened with interest, they understood me, for they loved each other dearly. When I had finished my story, I sprang up and danced about the room; I could not keep still.

"Look out!" said Marguerite; "you'll smash everything. Why, don't you see how fine it is here now, monsieur?"

I had not so much as looked about the room. In fact, there was some change: the wretched bed was replaced by a low bedstead of painted wood, but very neat and clean. There were curtains and a canopy above the bed. The chairs, which I remembered as almost all broken, had been replaced by six new ones; and a black walnut commode had replaced the little sideboard. Lastly, there was almost a good fire on the hearth.

"Do you see how fine it is?" said Marguerite; "my Ernest gave me all this. His play has succeeded. Oh, it is very pleasing indeed, his play is! When the author was called for and his name was given, I was so happy that I longed to shout: 'It was my little man who did that!'—He has a great mind, has my little man!"

"Will you hold your tongue, Marguerite?"

"No, monsieur, I propose to talk. We are not so poor now as we were. See, look at my mantel, see those two cups and the porcelain sugar bowl! That box is to put the money in for the week's expenses. When there's anything over, I put it in a Christmas box. Oh! we are very happy now!"

Poor child! how little she needed to esteem herself rich! So many people would have considered that chamber a wretched place still. I congratulated her and admired everything that she showed me. I complimented Ernest on the success of his play. I shared their happiness most sincerely; it made me happier to see how happy they were. I remained with them for more than an hour, talking of Eugénie and of our love. They told me of their little plans for the future, of the hopes in which they indulged,—very modest hopes, which proved that, being engrossed by their love, they knew neither ambition nor vanity.

I had not begun to think of retiring, and I believe that we should have passed the whole night talking thus; but suddenly we heard a loud noise on the roof, and broken glass falling on the leads and into the yard. I was startled at first; but I soon recovered myself and began to laugh as I glanced at Ernest and Marguerite, who did the same. It was Monsieur Pettermann breaking into his room.

VII

THE PRELIMINARIES OF HAPPINESS

I went every day to see Eugénie, for I did not see why I should continue to conceal my love. She loved me, she knew that I adored her; was it possible that her mother was not also aware of our sentiments? I had never dreamed of making Eugénie my mistress. My only desire and hope was for an enduring happiness.

Eugénie should be my wife. I was sure of her consent, but it would be necessary to have her mother's as well.

I believe that that good woman had divined my sentiments long before; parents are not always deceived by our little stratagems, by our affectation of coldness and ceremony; but when they pretend not to see, it means that they secretly approve our inclinations. Madame Dumeillan saw that I went there every day, and one does not go every day to a house where there is a pretty woman, unless there is love underneath. Eugénie pouted when I was late, and scolded me when I suggested going away; her mother heard it all and simply smiled. I saw that our love was no longer a secret to anyone.

Eugénie no longer called me Monsieur Blémont; she called me Monsieur Henri, and Henri simply, when we were alone. How pleasant it is to hear the woman we love call us for the first time by our Christian name, without that depressing *monsieur!* From that moment a stronger bond united us, a more tender intimacy existed between us. Eugénie could love as dearly as I; I read all her thoughts in her eyes; she no longer tried to conceal from me what she felt. I had found the woman that I desired: beauty, charm, wit and virtue. Yes, virtue; for Eugénie was kind, easily moved, and submissive and affectionate to her mother; I never heard her utter a murmur about complying with her slightest wish. I had judged her to be very coquettish, but I was mistaken; she loved the amusements of her age, she abandoned herself to them frankly and without reserve; but that is not coquetry. She laughed with those who tried to please her, but she gave false hopes to none of them. Now, when at her mother's receptions, young men came to pay court to her and to make complimentary speeches, she no longer laughed; their flattering words

bored her; her eyes sought me and followed me incessantly; and when she could escape from the crowd, she would come to me and whisper:

"Henri, I no longer enjoy society; I like it much better when you alone come to see us."

Perhaps Eugénie was a trifle too susceptible; she yielded too readily to first impressions. I found that she would sometimes take offence and sulk for several days on account of a remark misunderstood, or a perfectly innocent act; but I was sure that that trifling defect would disappear with time and experience. I believed also that Eugénie would be jealous, yes, very jealous; she changed color and was evidently disturbed when I happened to talk a long time with the same lady. But, far from blaming her for that sentiment, I was secretly overjoyed by it; that jealousy was a new proof of the love that I inspired in her. I should have been very sorry to have her indifferent when I was talking with a pretty woman; for then I should have thought that she cared but little for me. Moreover, I had not hoped to find a perfect mortal; they say that such do not exist. And if there were such a thing as a perfect woman, I should not care to marry her; I think that a man would be bored with her.

Eugénie agreed to teach me music; she declared that I had a sweet voice and that I sang with taste; we began our lessons at once. I did not make rapid progress, but as we enjoyed the lessons, and as they gave me an opportunity to be with Eugénie, to tell her again and again that I adored her, she gave them to me often, and I could not help becoming a musician. In my turn, I was to teach her painting; she had some idea of drawing and earnestly desired to be able to use a brush; and I had no doubt in a short time she would do honor to her master.

Every day increased my love for Eugénie, and every day I obtained new proofs of her attachment to me. Those delightful hours which I passed with her, but always in her mother's presence, made me long for a still greater happiness. Why should I delay to settle my fate? Eugénie, I felt sure, would accept joyfully the title of my wife.

Thus far I had spoken to her of love only, not of marriage. But what need had I to utter that word? And could Eugénie mention it to me? A well-bred young lady doesn't ask the man who is making love to her if he proposes to marry her, for she cannot assume that he has any other purpose. She who asks such a question always places herself in an unfavorable position; it is as if she said: "I will love you when I am sure that you will marry me." A wretched sort of love that, which one can order or countermand at will!

One day I went to Madame Dumeillan's. It was about noon. By an extraordinary chance Eugénie was alone; her mother had gone to pay a visit, and Eugénie had succeeded in excusing herself from accompanying her; she hoped that I would come. She told me so with that charming smile which transported me and filled me with rapture; she gave me her hand, which I pressed ecstatically; then I seated myself beside her, very close, as close as I possibly could. I talked to her of my love; I told her—as I had told her a hundred times before—that I was happy only with her. But one is never weary of listening to protestations of a passion which one shares; when such assurances tire us, it means that our hearts are beginning to change.

As I talked with Eugénie, I passed my arm about her waist for the first time, and I drew her lovingly toward me; but she gently extricated herself and rose, saying:

"Come, monsieur, come to the piano, you must take a lesson this morning."

I felt incapable of looking calmly at the notes; I detained Eugénie by the hand.

"Let us continue to talk, please! We have plenty of time for the piano."

"We can talk while we practise."

"It would be impossible for me to practise this morning."

"Why so, monsieur? Do you mean that you are tired of your music lessons already?"

"Oh, no! but I have so many things to say to you! It so seldom happens that I find you alone!"

"Does mamma's presence prevent you from talking with me? Don't we talk hours at a time every evening, while they are playing cards?"

"Yes, but that isn't the same thing; it's much pleasanter to be alone! Dear Eugénie! I would like to pass my life with you and nobody else!"

"Oh! you would very soon get tired of that!"

"Tired of being with you! Impossible! But perhaps you yourself would not be willing to sacrifice to me the attentions of this mob of young men who sigh for you."

"Oh! how mean it is to say that! When I am bored to death everywhere where you are not! Do you mean to say that I listen to the compliments and flattery of a lot of young men? Nonsense! come to the piano, monsieur!"

"Just a moment!"

I adored her, I was certain that she loved me, and yet I trembled at the thought of mentioning the word marriage! What a strange thing! To hesitate, to be embarrassed about mentioning to the person you love, a

bond which you both desire! I had never hesitated with a pretty woman about overcoming her modesty and abusing her weakness; it seems to me that it requires more courage to behave oneself than to misbehave.

I held Eugénie's hand, which she abandoned to me; I could not speak, but I covered her hand with kisses. I did not know if she guessed all that was going on in my heart; but a deep flush covered her cheeks, and she turned her eyes away in order to avoid mine. At last I stammered in an undertone and with an almost shame-faced air:

"Eugénie—will you be my wife?"

She did not answer, but her hand pressed mine affectionately; her bosom rose and fell violently; I met her eyes, which she tried to avert, and they were wet with tears. How sweet are the tears which pleasure causes one to shed! I fell at Eugénie's feet, reiterating my oath to love her all my life.

I was still at her feet—one is so comfortable in that position before the woman whom one adores! It has been said, I believe, that nothing is more absurd than a man at a woman's feet; that may be true with respect to a woman who resists us, but with her who loves us, I can see nothing absurd in that position—I was still at her feet, when the door of the salon opened; it was Madame Dumeillan. She found me at her daughter's feet.

I was not confused at being surprised in that attitude, for I had no guilty designs; and Eugénie herself looked at her mother without alarm; but she said to her, with a blush:

"Mamma, he swears that he will love me all his life; he asks me if I will be his wife."

The mother smiled; we had told her nothing new. But I ran to her, seized her hands and pressed them in mine,

and begged her not to stand in the way of my happiness and to call me her son.

"What answer has Eugénie given you?" asked Madame Dumeillan kindly. "I am inclined to spoil her a little, you know; if she doesn't want to marry you, I warn you that I shall not force her."

As she said that, the good woman glanced at her daughter mischievously; she knew very well that my love was returned. Eugénie threw herself into the arms of her mother and concealed her sweet face upon her breast; she could not speak, and I myself had hardly the strength to do so. Madame Dumeillan took her daughter's hand and placed it in mine. Eugénie's face was still hidden, but her hand answered my pressure. Her mother put her arms about us and held us to her heart. What a blissful moment! Shall I ever enjoy a purer happiness?

This first outburst of enthusiasm passed, Madame Dumeillan exclaimed:

"Well, on my word! I am acting very thoughtlessly for a mother! Here I am joining your hands, and I do not even know whether you have your mother's consent, whether an alliance with our family will be agreeable to her."

"Oh! yes, madame, I have no fears in that direction. My mother will be overjoyed to see me married; the choice that I have made cannot fail to please her. I have never yet mentioned it to her because first of all I wanted to know whether Eugénie,—whether mademoiselle your daughter——"

"Nonsense! say Eugénie, monsieur; you have that privilege now; you give him leave, do you not, my daughter?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Dear Eugénie! oh! how kind you are, madame! But I will go at once to see my mother; I propose that she shall come herself to-morrow."

"Oh, dear me! give her a little time."

"No, madame, we must move quickly in order to be happy. You have given your consent, may I not be in haste to call you my mother, too?"

"To call her your wife, you mean, you rascal!"

"Well, yes, I am crazy to call her my wife! Dear Eugénie! I am so happy! I will hurry to my mother's."

"So soon! Why, he is mad, on my word!"

"You will come again this evening, Henri?"

"Can you ask me such a question?"

I kissed Eugénie's hand and Madame Dumeillan's, and hurried from the house, to go to my mother. Ah! I was very happy; and yet I longed to be a few weeks older, in order to be even happier. But we are forever longing to grow old, and if we had our whole lives at our disposal, we should use them up in a very short time.

My mother was not at home. What a nuisance! She had gone out to make some calls. Upon whom? Where should I look for her? I went away, informing the servant that I would come again. I went away, but I had no idea where to go. My mother lived on Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule, and I knew no one in that neighborhood. Eugénie lived too far away for me to return there, for I intended to go to my mother's again soon. I determined to walk about on the boulevards in the Marais; they are less frequented there than elsewhere, and I could think of my Eugénie without being distracted by the crowd.

I walked there for fifteen minutes, then returned to my mother's; she had not come in, and I must needs walk still longer. What a bore! I should have had time to go to see Eugénie; away from her, I seemed not to live.

A little man passed me, turned about, then stopped, barring my path. I had paid no attention to his performance, but he called out:

"I say! what in the devil are you thinking about, that you don't recognize your friends?"

It was Bélan. I shook hands with him.

"I beg your pardon, my dear Bélan, but I did not see you."

"You were terribly preoccupied. You were thinking of your love-affairs, I'll wager."

"Faith, yes; I don't deny it. I was thinking of the woman I shall adore all my life."

"Oho! how exalted we are! I recognize myself in that!"

I was like a child, I longed to tell everybody what made me happy. I told Bélan of my love and of my impending marriage to Mademoiselle Dumeillan. The little rake made a pirouette and clapped his hands, crying:

"The deuce! you are going to be married? On my word, there is a secret sympathy between us: I am thinking of marrying too."

"Really?"

"Yes. In fact, I am fully decided upon it; I am tired of *bonnes fortunes*. And then, when your life is always in danger, it becomes wearisome after a while. Since my adventure with Montdidier—you remember?"

"Oh yes! perfectly; it was that day that I first saw Eugénie at Giraud's."

"Oho! so you met your future wife at Giraud's, did you? Then it was they who arranged the marriage?"

"No indeed. Madame Dumeillan sees them very seldom. For my part, I have never mentioned them to her; it doesn't seem to me that I need Giraud to arrange a marriage for me."

"Never mind; as it was at his house that you met the young woman, he will be furious if he isn't invited to the wedding, if he doesn't manage the whole thing, if his wife is not near the head of the table, and if his three children aren't allowed to stuff their pockets with desert."

"In that case I fancy that he will have a chance to be furious."

"To return to myself, my dear fellow, I must tell you that since my adventure with Madame Montdidier, I have had some very disagreeable times: obliged to jump out of the window of an entresol; another time, to pass the night on a balcony, where I caught a cold that cost me eight bottles of syrup; and lastly, to avoid being surprised by a husband, compelled to hide in a chest, where I nearly stifled! I stayed in it an hour, and when they let me out, I was purple; my breath was all gone; faith! that completely disgusted me with love-affairs and intrigues; and like yourself, I propose to have done with them. I am courting a young lady who lives on Rue de la Roquette. I am going there now. You may have seen her at Giraud's—Mademoiselle de Beausire?"

"I don't remember seeing her."

"Ah! she is a very handsome girl; regular features, aquiline nose—I am very fond of aquiline noses—extraordinary eyes, small waist, beautiful figure,—everything is there!"

"Everything,—you are sure?"

"Bah! you wicked joker! yes, I am sure of it. Anybody can see that at once. I am paying most assiduous court to her, and I have reason to believe that she does not look upon me with indifference. Not long ago, while we were playing games at her mother's house, she chose me to whisper a secret to; she came to me blushing, and

said in my ear: 'I don't know what to say to you.' I was enchanted!"

"I don't wonder."

"Yes, for 'I don't know what to say to you' meant: 'I am afraid of saying too much.'"

"With a well-disposed person it might mean that."

"Since then I have made no secret of my intentions. Indeed, she is an excellent match; she has a dowry of eighty thousand francs, and brilliant expectations. Her family is noble. And look you, my dear fellow, I confess that, in order to make myself more attractive to the mother, I ventured to put a little *de* before my name; it was Giraud who advised me to do it. I am now called Ferdinand de Bélan."

"Oho! so you have ennobled yourself on your own authority?"

"My dear fellow, I believe that I have a right to do it; while searching through my family papers, I discovered that one of my ancestors was an officer of the kitchen to Louis XV, and a man had to be of noble birth to fill that post. It was during the Revolution, no doubt, that my father dropped the *de*, from fright."

"But I have often heard you profess the most profound contempt for titles, and make sport of old parchments."

"Oh! a man often says a thing, you know, just so as to seem to have an opinion;—You must see my future wife, you must see her, that's all I say. And my mother-in-law—a superb woman still, and with such a manner! she used to be at court, so she is a little strict in the matter of etiquette; but she adores her daughter and she has sworn never to part from her!"

"So you are going to marry two women at once, are you?"

"Oh! that is merely a figure of speech. But this is the time of day when the ladies are visible. Adieu, my dear Blémont; I invite you beforehand to my wedding; for I propose to have a magnificent wedding party at Lointier's; his rooms are superb. I have already in my mind the two costumes which I shall wear on that great day, and the steps I shall perform to open the ball. I trust that I shall go to your wedding, too?"

"Really, I don't know whether we shall have any celebration. That will be as Eugénie wishes; I assure you that I do not give any thought to that."

"Well, I dream every night of weddings, banquets and dances; twice I have tipped over my somno, thinking that I was opening the ball. Really it is very nice to be married: if anyone would assure me twelve thousand francs a year, I wouldn't remain a bachelor. Adieu, my friend: I must hurry to wait upon those ladies."

For my part, I went again to my mother's, and that time I found her. She had not finished asking me about my health when I began to tell her of my love-affairs; and I did not stop until I had begged her to go to Madame Dumeillan's with me at once.

But my mother did not share my eagerness, which indeed made her smile. She was very glad that I was thinking of settling down, and she had no doubt that I had made an excellent choice; but she fell back on the heartless conventional phrases:

"We must see; we must make sure; we must not be in a hurry."

Not be in a hurry when one's happiness is in the balance! ah! parents never choose to remember the time when they were in love! I urged and entreated my mother to go at once to see the ladies. She calmly called my attention to the fact that it was four o'clock, that

she was dining out, and that it was too late for her to call upon Madame Dumeillan that day. All that I could obtain from her was a promise to go on the following day; she even gave me permission to inform the ladies that she would call.

I had no choice but to make the best of it. I left my mother, and I would have sworn that, before I reached the foot of the stairs, she had already forgotten my visit, and was wondering what partner she would have at whist that evening.

I returned to Eugénie after dinner. Nowhere else could I be patient and find means of passing the time until the day when I should be her husband.

Unluckily, it was the evening of Madame Dumeillan's reception; many people came, and we could not talk. My eyes expressed to Eugénie all the impatience that I felt because I was unable to talk to her of my love; and her glances told me that she shared my annoyance. At that moment, society was most disagreeable to us. If all those people had known how pleased we should have been to see them go!

However, the card tables being arranged, I hoped to be able to approach Eugénie at last; but behold, Monsieur Giraud and his wife arrived. After the usual greeting and exchange of compliments, Madame Giraud took possession of Eugénie, and her husband joined me. He talked to me in what, as I thought, he intended as a sly tone. He had evidently heard that I was paying court to Mademoiselle Dumeillan; he thought that perhaps I would ask him to negotiate my marriage, to speak for me, to arrange the provisions of the contract. Poor Giraud! I saw what he was driving at; I pretended not to understand his hints and allusions. When he mentioned Eugénie, I changed the subject. He was offended; he rose

and left me. That was what I wanted. I was sure that his wife was going through the same manœuvres with Eugénie. Bélan was right; those people would never forgive us if we married without letting them have a hand in it; but we could do without their forgiveness.

Madame Giraud walked away from Eugénie with evident displeasure. Eugénie glanced at me with a smile; I had guessed aright the subject of their conversation. The husband and wife met and whispered earnestly together; then they walked toward Madame Dumeillan and surrounded her, one at her right, and the other at her left; she could not escape them. They evidently proposed to try to learn more from Eugénie's mother; but I knew that they would waste their time, that Madame Dumeillan would tell them nothing; she invented an excuse for leaving them after talking a few moments.

Giraud and his wife were very angry. They came toward me again, and I expected that they would hurl epigrams at me and tear me with their claws. I was not mistaken; Madame Giraud began, speaking to her husband so that I should hear:

"It is very amusing, isn't it, Monsieur Giraud?"

"Yes, Madame Giraud, very amusing; there is a great deal of diplomacy here."

"Yes, they make a mystery of something that is everybody's secret."

"Aha! they evidently take us for fools."

"It seems that way to me."

"Wouldn't anyone say that it was a question of uniting two great powers?"

"Perhaps they are afraid they will have to invite us to the wedding."

"Great heaven! weddings! we have no lack of them; in fact, we have so many that it is fairly sickening."

"I declined an invitation to another to-morrow. And there is poor Bélan who has already invited us to his, which is to be at Lointier's."

"That young man will make a very good husband. Does he get along all right with Madame de Beausire?"

"Oh, yes! since I went to see the mother-in-law, all the obstacles have disappeared. There are some people who aren't afraid to let me take a hand in their affairs, and who are greatly benefited by it."

"Let us go, Monsieur Giraud; we still have time to go and see our good friends who have that expensive apartment on Rue de la Paix, and whose daughter you found a husband for two months ago."

"You are right; I am sure that they expect us to have a cup of tea."

The husband and wife disappeared without a word to anyone. And those creatures were offended with us because we found it natural and convenient to manage our own affairs! But in society it takes so little to make enemies, especially of narrow-minded people.

The guests began to leave, and I found a moment to talk with Eugénie. I told her that my mother would come to see her the next day. She blushed and sighed as she replied:

"Suppose she doesn't like me? suppose she isn't willing to have me for her daughter?"

Not like her! who could fail to like her? I was not at all disturbed. I reassured Eugénie, and I left her at last when the clock so ordered, as I had not as yet the right not to leave her at all.

On returning home, I met Ernest coming down from his mistress's room. Since I had been spending all my time at Madame Dumeillan's, I had sadly neglected my friends of the fifth floor. Ernest reproached me for it

mildly, but they were not offended; they knew that I was in love, and thought it quite natural that I should think of no one but my love. But Ernest said to me:

"I hope that you will come to see us sometimes, although Marguerite will soon cease to be your neighbor."

"Is she going to move?"

"In a week. She is not going to live in an attic any longer, thank heaven! Poor child! she has been miserable enough; she has made so many sacrifices for me, that I may well be glad to offer her a pleasanter position at last. Thank heaven! my affairs are prosperous. I have been successful, my friend, and I have made money. I have not squandered it at the cafés or restaurants, because I have always remembered Marguerite, in her attic, poor and destitute of everything. You see that, whatever my parents may say, it is not always a bad thing to have a poor mistress, for it has made me orderly and economical in good season."

"I see that you are not selfish, and that you are not like many young men of your age, who think that they have done enough for a woman when they have taken her to a theatre and to a restaurant,—pleasures which they share with her,—but who cease to think about her as soon as they have left her at home."

"I have hired a pretty little apartment on Rue du Temple, nearly opposite the baths. That is where we are going to live; I say we, because I hope that before long Marguerite and I shall not be parted. It matters little to me what people say; I propose to be happy, and I shall let evil tongues say what they will."

"You are right, my dear Ernest; happiness is rare enough for a person to make some sacrifices to obtain it. I am going to marry my Eugénie! I have attained the height of my ambition!"

“I might marry Marguerite too; but we are so happy as we are! Why should we change? Besides, we have plenty of time, haven’t we? Adieu, my dear Blémont. You will come to see us, won’t you?”

“Yes, I promise you that I will.”

VIII

MARRIAGE.—A MEETING.—THE BALL

My mother went to see Madame Dumeillan, and they suited each other. It is a miracle when two women of mature years suit each other. My mother found Eugénie very attractive; she complimented me on my choice, and she was very hard to suit, too. I was overjoyed, in ecstasy. The provisions of the contract were very soon arranged by the two ladies, each of whom had but one child. For my part, I hurried forward the wedding day to the best of my ability. And yet, I was very happy. I passed three-quarters of my afternoons and all my evenings with Eugénie. If the ladies went out, I escorted them. Our approaching union was no secret, and many young men congratulated me on my good fortune. Some of them sighed as they glanced at Eugénie; perhaps they were in love with her. Poor fellows! I pitied them; but I could do nothing for them.

It was decided that I should retain the apartment which I occupied. It was large enough for my wife, and I had it decorated carefully in accordance with her taste. It would not have been large enough if Madame Dumeillan had come to live with us, as I expected at first.

Eugénie too hoped that she would not leave her; but Madame Dumeillan said to her affectionately but firmly:

"No, my child, I shall not live with you. When a man marries, he wishes to take but one wife; why give him two? I know that Henri is fond of me; that he would be glad to have me live with him; but I know also, my children, that a young couple often have a thousand things to say to each other, and that a third person, no matter how dearly loved, is sometimes in the way. In love, in jealousy, in the most trivial disputes, the presence of a third person may be most harmful, and may prolong for a week what need have lasted but a moment; it checks the outpouring of love and intensifies the bitterness of reproach. But I will live near you, and I shall see you often, very often. And whenever you want me, you will always be able to find me."

Eugénie was obliged to yield to her mother, and for my part, I considered that Madame Dumeillan was right.

Should we have a wedding party? That was a question which I asked myself, and which I was tempted more than once to put to Eugénie. But a little reflection convinced me that I should be wrong not to celebrate my marriage. To please me, Eugénie would pretend that she did not care about a ball; but at twenty years of age, possessed of innumerable charms, endowed with all the graces which attract and subjugate, is it not natural for a woman to long to show herself in all the glory of her happiness? Is that not a marked day in her life when she is called madame for the first time, although she has not absolutely ceased to be a maiden; when she has not as yet the assurance of the former, but on the contrary has all the shrinking modesty of the other in an intensified form? Yes, at the age of love and enjoyment, it is essential to have a wedding party; doubly so, when one marries

the object of one's passion; for happiness is always an embellishment. My Eugénie needed no embellishment; but why should I not have a little vanity? Why should I not be proud of my triumph?

So it was decided that we should have a wedding party: that is to say, a grand breakfast after the ceremony, and in the evening a supper and ball at Lointier's. I determined to look to it that my Eugénie should have magnificent dresses for that great day; not that she could possibly be more beautiful in my eyes, but I wished that she should enjoy all those triumphs which mark an epoch in a woman's life. I gave her leave to be a coquette on that day.

The moment of my happiness drew near. We turned our attention to the list of guests. For the breakfast there would be very few, enough however to make sure that they would not be bored, and that it should not have the aspect of a family party. For the evening, many people were invited; the salons were large, and it was necessary to fill them. We simply tried to make sure that in the throng none of those fine gentlemen should worm themselves in, who are known neither to the groom nor to the bride, nor to their relations, but who boldly present themselves at a large party, where, under cover of their decent exterior, they consume ices and often cheat at écarté.

We had already written a multitude of names; I had not forgotten Bélan, and as the ladies were slightly acquainted with Madame de Beausire and her daughter, we sent them an invitation too; I knew that that would rejoice poor Ferdinand. Suddenly I stopped, and looking at Eugénie and her mother with a smile, I said to them:

“ Shall we put down their names too? ”

"I am sure that I know whom you mean!" cried Eugénie. "Henri is thinking of the Giraud family."

"Exactly."

"Why invite them?" asked Madame Dumeillan; "they are terrible bores, and their inquisitiveness actually amounts to spying."

"I agree with you, and the last time they came to your reception they made themselves ridiculous. But I cannot forget that it was at their house that I first met Eugénie. And then our invitation will please them so much! and when I am so happy, I like others to be so."

"Henri is right, mamma; let us invite them."

So Giraud's name was put down on the list. At last, the solemn day arrived. I rose at six o'clock in the morning, having slept hardly at all. I could not keep still. What should I do until eleven o'clock, when I was to call for my mother, and then for my Eugénie? To read was impossible; to draw or to paint was equally impossible. To think of her—ah! I did nothing else; but it fatigued me and did not divert my thoughts. After dressing, I went all over my apartment, where I was still alone; I made sure that nothing was lacking. I hoped that she would be comfortable there. That apartment, which I had occupied four years, involuntarily reminded me of a thousand incidents of my bachelor life. That room, that little salon had seen more than one female figure. I had received many visits. When a lady had promised to come to breakfast or to pass the day with me, how impatiently I counted the minutes! How, until the time arrived, I dreaded lest some inopportune visitor should ring the bell in place of her whom I expected! How many kisses, oaths and promises had been exchanged on that couch! And all those things were so soon forgotten!—Ah! I was very happy in those days too!

But suddenly I thought of all the letters I had received; I had not burned them, and they were in a casket on my desk. I had often enjoyed reading them over; but suppose Eugénie should find them! I determined to burn them, to burn them all; for what was the use of them now?

I took out the casket which contained them; I opened it; it was stuffed with them. There are some women who are so fond of writing, either because they write well, or because they think they do, or simply because they love one. I took all the letters and carried them to the fireplace, where I made a pile of them. But before setting fire to them, I opened one, then another, then another; each of them reminded me of an episode, some day of my life. It is strange how quickly time passes amid such old souvenirs. The clock struck nine, and I was still reading. I was no longer in love with any of those women, but it was my last farewell to bachelorhood.

I set them afire, not without a faint sigh. At last my bachelor amours were burned, and only a pinch of ashes remained; some day nothing more will remain of all the riches, of all the marvels of this earth.

Those were very serious thoughts for a wedding day, but they served to pass the time, and that was something. Moreover, extremes always meet: the happier one is, the more disposed is one's mind to melancholy thoughts. A grocer weighing sugar, or a postman delivering letters, does not feel such impressions.

But I almost forgot something else; for since I had thought of nothing but Eugénie from morning until night, it was not surprising that I had not set all my affairs in order. I had once amused myself by painting miniatures of some of the ladies whose letters I had just

burned. Those portraits were in the desk upon which I painted; there were eight of them.

Should I sacrifice them as well? It would have been a pity; not because of the models, but because the miniatures were really not bad. Why destroy them? In the first place, Eugénie would never see them; and even if she should see them, they were fancy portraits. When one paints from life, one must necessarily paint portraits. So I had mercy upon those ladies, and replaced their pretty faces in the depths of the desk, whence I thought that they would never come forth.

Now I had carefully scrutinized and examined everything; nothing was left which could possibly offend Eugénie's eye. No, she could come there now and reign as mistress; thenceforth no other woman should enter those rooms than such as she should choose to receive.

It was time to think about dressing. I thought it would do no harm if I were at my mother's a little before the hour. If only the carriages did not keep me waiting. But someone entered my room; it was my concierge and his wife, with a big bouquet. Did they think I was going to put it in my buttonhole?

The husband came forward with an affable expression and was about to speak, but his wife did not give him time.

"Monsieur," she said, "this is your wedding day; we are very glad to be able to congratulate you on such a happy day, by offering you this bouquet and our compliments; these immortelles are the symbol of your happiness, which will last forever."

While his wife glibly delivered this speech, the concierge tried to slip in a few words, but he did not succeed. I took the bouquet, gave them some money and dismissed them. A wedding day would have little charm

if one must submit to many congratulations of that sort. At last a carriage arrived. I went downstairs and passed rapidly before a long line of cooks and some gossiping old women who lived in the house, who were stationed in the courtyard to see me, as if a man who was going to be married had his nose placed otherwise than usual on that day.

I was driven to my mother's, and found that she had just begun to dress.

"It isn't eleven o'clock yet," she said; "we have plenty of time; go and read the newspaper."

Read the newspaper! just at the moment that I was to be married! I, who could not read one through when I had nothing to do! No, I preferred to remain there, and each five minutes I knocked at the door of her dressing-room to enquire if she were ready.

At a quarter-past eleven I carried my mother off, I almost dragged her away, although she declared that her bonnet was on crooked and that she wanted to have the ribbons changed. I refused to listen, we entered the carriage, and I swore to my mother that her headgear was in perfect order; she became calmer and consented to be amiable once more.

We arrived at Madame Dumeillan's. Eugénie was ready; I was confident that she would not keep me waiting, that she would have pity on my impatience. Her dress was charming, according to all the people who were there; for my part, I did not notice her dress, I saw only her, and I should have thought her a thousand times lovelier if it had been possible.

One of our witnesses kept us waiting. There are people who would not hurry one iota to please others, and who know of nothing in the world that is important enough for haste. I could not live with such people.

At last the tardy witness arrived and we started for the mayor's office. I was not allowed to escort Eugénie. On that day everything was subordinate to ceremony; a man must be happier on the day after his wedding than on his wedding day.

I have never cared much for ceremonial, and that of my marriage seemed extremely long. To give me courage, I looked at my wife; she was more impressed than I by the solemnity of the moment; she was deeply moved and was weeping. Dear Eugénie! I thought of nothing but loving her forever, and it was certainly not necessary for anyone to order me to do it.

It came to an end at last. We returned to the carriages, still in procession, and through a crowd of curious folk who devoured us with their eyes. I felt more buoyant, happier. I was so glad that it was over!

I spied Giraud and his wife at the church, in full array; they had offered us congratulations which I had not listened to; but I had said to them: "until this evening;" and they replied with a low bow.

We drove to Lointier's, where a handsome breakfast awaited us. But a wedding breakfast is generally a decidedly gloomy affair. The bride can hardly be expected to laugh, and even when she is happiest, she is thoughtful and talks little; the grandparents are always intent upon preserving their dignity. For my part, I was engrossed, or rather annoyed, by the reflection that it was still early in the day. There were in the party some jokers, or persons who tried to joke; one stout gentleman, a kinsman of my mother, regaled us with some of those superannuated jests concerning the occasion and happiness that awaited us; but his sallies met with no success; nobody laughed at them, and he was forced to keep to himself the ample store of *bons mots* with which

I am sure that he was provided. I was delighted, because I considered such jests very bad form; they should be left for the weddings of concierges or servants; the modesty of a young woman who has but one day of innocence left should be respected; and we should assume innocence in those who have none.

Eugénie and I were at a distance from each other; we could not talk, but we glanced furtively at each other and our eyes mutually counselled patience.

The clock struck five, and the ladies left to change their dresses. I escorted my wife to the carriage which was to take her home with her mother. I would have been glad to go with her, but Madame Dumeillan and my mother persuaded me that it was my duty to remain with the guests who were still at table. Eugénie leaned toward me and whispered in my ear:

“Oh! we shall be much happier to-morrow, my dear! we shall not be separated then, I trust.”

Dear Eugénie, you were quite right. I had to return to the table, because it pleased some of our guests to eat and drink through four hours. If only I had been hungry!

We left the table at last, at six o'clock. Several of the gentlemen began to play cards. As courtesy did not require me to watch them lose their money, I left the restaurant and drove to my wife's house.

The hairdresser had just arrived, and she had abandoned her lovely hair to him. Really, those hairdressers are too fortunate, to be able to pass their fingers through those lovely locks and to gaze constantly at the pretty head which is entrusted to them. That one took at least three-quarters of an hour to arrange Eugénie's hair, as if it were difficult to make her look charming! But women are wonderfully patient with respect to everything that pertains to their toilet.

Her hair was arranged at last; but they took her away, for she was not dressed. My wife was not yet mine; she was still in the grasp of the conventionalities of that day. I was fain to be patient, until I once had possession of her. But that night I would bolt all the doors, and no one should see her the next morning until I chose.

I saw that Eugénie would not be dressed for at least an hour, so I went out and tried to kill time. I jumped into one of the carriages which were waiting at the door, and was driven to the Tuileries. I alighted on Rue de Rivoli, and entered the garden. The day was drawing to a close; the weather was gloomy and uncertain. There were very few people under those superb chestnuts toward which I walked. I was delighted, for I do not care for a promenade where there is a crowd; the people who stare at you or jostle you every moment prevent you from dreaming, from thinking at your leisure.

I rarely went to the Tuileries; to my mind that great garden was melancholy and monotonous; but on that day it seemed pleasanter to me, for I could think freely of my wife. My wife! those words still had a strange sound to me. I was married, I who had so often laughed at husbands! Had I been wrong to laugh at them, or should I prove an exception to the rule?

I walked at random. Finally I found myself in front of the enclosure where the statues of Hippomenes and Atalanta stand. That reminded me of a certain assignation. It was three years before, in the middle of winter. There had been a heavy fall of snow; the garden, the benches were covered with it, and it was very cold. But I had an assignation, and on such occasions one does not consult the thermometer. It was with a certain Lucile, who, for decency's sake, called herself Madame Lejeune, and who mended cashmere shawls. She was very pretty,

was Lucile. About twenty-three years old at that time, with a pretty, shapely figure, and an almost distinguished face which did not betray the grisette. I had an idea that her portrait was among those that I had preserved. She was accustomed to love madly for a fortnight; during the third week she calmed down, and ordinarily she was unfaithful by the end of the month. As I had been warned, I considered it more amusing to anticipate her, and to take up with another before the fortnight had expired. She did not forgive me; her self-esteem was wounded, for I have no idea that she would have been more constant with me than with others; but she tried to make me believe that she would have, and whenever I met her I could always detect a flavor of bitterness in her speech and anger in her glance.

It was in front of that enclosure, close by those statues, that we had arranged to meet. I remembered that Lucile was there before me, despite the extreme cold. We had not known each other four days, and we adored each other. She did not reprove me for keeping her waiting, and yet her nose and chin were purple with cold, and her fingers were stiff; but her eyes burned. I put her into a cab and took her to dine at Pelletan's, at the Pavillon-Français. It was one of the red-letter days of my bachelorhood.

Very good, but the whole business was not worth one smile from Eugénie. I was about to turn away from Atalanta, when I saw within a few feet of me a lady dressed with some elegance, who was looking at me with a smile on her lips.

"You must admit," she said, "that the snow is all that is needed to make the resemblance complete."

It was Lucile! What a strange chance! I walked toward her.

"You here, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur; and I beg you to believe that I have not come here in search of memories."

"I am here, madame, by the merest chance. But, as I passed these statues, I remembered a certain assignation, one winter, and I confess that I was thinking of you."

"Really! Ah! that is most flattering on your part! You have to come to the Tuileries to do that, do you not, monsieur?"

"If that were so, madame, you must admit that other men devote their thoughts to you. One aspirant more or less—you can hardly detect the difference."

"Ah! your remarks are exceedingly polite! But I am not surprised: you have never been anything but agreeable to me! You are the same as ever!"

"I do not see that I have said anything to you that——"

"Oh! mon Dieu! let us drop the subject. You might conclude that I attach great value to memories of you, and you would be much mistaken. But how fine you are! Are you going to a wedding?"

"Just so; I have been one of a wedding party since morning, and I came here for a walk while the bride is dressing herself for the ball."

"Oho! you are a wedding guest to-day! Is the bride pretty?"

"Lovely."

"A widow or unmarried?"

"Unmarried."

"How old?"

"Twenty years."

"Has she—you know what?"

"I can tell you that better to-morrow, if I should happen to see you."

"Are you the best man?"

"Better than that."

"Better than that! What! Do you mean—Oh, no! that is impossible. You are not going to be married?"

"Why is it impossible?"

"Because you don't do such crazy things as that."

"I don't know whether marriage is always a crazy thing, but I can assure you that I was married this morning, and that, far from regretting it, I congratulate myself upon it."

"Oh! if it was only this morning, that is easy to understand.—What! are you really married, Henri? Ha! ha! how amusing it is!"

"What is there so amusing about it?"

"Ha! ha! ha! Poor Henri! You are married! Upon my word, I can't get over it. But I promise you that it gives me the very greatest pleasure! Ha! ha! ha!"

Lucile's sneering laughter had an ironical note that began to irritate me. I bowed to her and turned away, but she detained me.

"By the way, one moment, monsieur; it is probable that I shall not have the pleasure of talking with you again for a long time, for a married man doesn't go out without his wife. So yours is very pretty, is she?"

"Yes."

"And are you very much in love with her?"

"More than I have ever been."

"Oh! how frank!"

"Why shouldn't I say what I think?"

"To be sure. Then you must try to make her love you more than you have ever been loved. Ha! ha!"

"I think that that will not be difficult."

"Do you think so? You may be mistaken."

"Excuse me, madame, if I leave you; but my wife must have finished dressing, and I must return for her."

"If *your wife* is waiting for you, why, go, monsieur; and see to it that she never waits for anybody else. Ha! ha!"

I saw that Lucile had not forgiven me. I left her. I was unable to conceal the vexation that that woman caused me to feel. I jumped into the carriage which took me back to Eugénie. She was waiting for me; the sight of her, a single word from her lips, speedily dissipated that slight cloud. Eugénie was dazzling; her charms, her graces, her lovely dress, everything combined to add fascination to her aspect. I took her hand.

"It is time to go to the ball; let us start," said Madame Dumeillan and my mother. I held Eugénie's hand, I was looking at my wife, and I had forgotten everything else.

Our appearance in the salons was greeted with a flattering murmur. Words of praise rang in my ears, and I admit that they flattered my heart too; it was my wife who was the object of universal admiration. Eugénie blushed and lowered her eyes; but it would have been difficult for her to avoid hearing the compliments which were rained upon her as she passed.

There were many people already there, and my acquaintances came forward to greet me. Giraud took my hand and pressed it. I felt inclined to be friendly with everyone, I was so happy! The men crowded about my wife to obtain the favor of dancing with her; they took their numbers, and I overheard one of them say that he was number twenty-six. Judging from that, it was evident that I could not look forward to dancing with my wife that night. But I made the best of it, and invited other ladies to dance.

I spied a little man, pushing and jostling everybody to make a passage for himself; it was Bélan, escorting a young lady who was at least a head taller than he, and with whom he was about to dance. When they passed me, they stopped, and he said to me:

“My friend, this is Mademoiselle Armide de Beausire, of whom I have spoken to you so often.”

I bowed low before Mademoiselle Armide, who was neither beautiful nor ugly, and whose eyes were almost as large as her mouth; but there was in her face and in her whole person something stiff and prim which smelt of the province a league away.

People crowded around Bélan and Mademoiselle Armide to see them dance. The little man danced very well; and as he had a very good figure, he had procured tight trousers, a tight coat and a tight waistcoat; there was not a fold to be seen on his whole body; if his face had been black you would have thought that he was a little negro *in puris naturalibus*.

Between the contradances I struggled through the crowd, to try to introduce to my wife a crowd of people whom I hardly knew, but who said to me:

“Won’t you present me to madame?”

At midnight the crowd had become so great that it was difficult to move. Did I know all those people? No; but I had told several of my acquaintances to bring their acquaintances, and that sort of thing extends very far sometimes. However, it was a brilliant affair. There were lovely dresses and very pretty women; the men were well-dressed, and I saw none of those expressionless, ignoble faces, none of those old creased caps which one is surprised sometimes to see at a fashionable party, where however they often have more right to be than most people; for those unattractive, common faces which

we see in corners at a wedding party usually belong to some uncle or some cousin whom it was impossible not to invite.

Three times I found Giraud eating ices or carrying them to his wife. He had brought only two of his children; the two older ones; that was very considerate of him. I was so happy that I asked Madame Giraud to dance, and she seemed highly flattered by that courtesy. But what did it matter to me with whom I danced when it was not Eugénie? I no longer thought of paying court to ladies; other times, other ideas.

"Your ball is delightful," said Bélan, leading me into a salon where card playing was in progress, but where it was possible to move about. "There are at least four hundred people here."

"Faith! I should be hard put to it to say how many there are here. If they are enjoying themselves, that is all that is necessary."

"It will be like this at my wedding. What do you think of Armide?"

"She is very attractive."

"And her eyes?"

"They are superb."

"They are extraordinary, are they not? Well, my dear fellow, she has everything like that,—wit, talents, and such an air of distinction! Did you see us dancing together?"

"Yes."

"Didn't we get along well?"

"It is a pity that you are a little short beside her."

"Short! you are joking. She is a little tall! However, when a man is built as I am, it is worth three inches of height. I certainly wouldn't change figures with that tall, lanky man in front of us. Those tall fellows

are always awkward. Have you seen Madame de Beausire?"

"I don't think so."

"Come then, and let me present you to her. You will see a woman who hasn't a single touch of the plebeian; she is the type of true distinction."

I submitted to be led away; I did whatever anyone wanted that night. I saw a tall, yellow woman who resembled a piece of old tapestry, and who looked as if she had never laughed since she came into the world. I made haste to bow and to run away. It seemed to me that one must necessarily catch the *spleen* in Madame de Beausire's company.

The supper hour arrived; at last the ball was drawing to a close; and although I was not exactly bored, still I should have been very glad to be at home with my wife.

The ladies were conducted to their seats. I looked after the comfort of everybody; I saw that the tables, large and small alike, were properly waited upon.

"Pray rest a moment and eat something," people said to me.

Much I thought about eating! I preferred to hurry the supper of that multitude.

I found Giraud and his two children sitting at a small table with three young men. Giraud had a currant cake on his knees, and he had slipped a bowl of jelly under the table, not choosing to pass it, for fear it would not come back to him. I called for fish, chickens, and *pâté*; I covered his children's plates with cakes. Giraud was in ecstasy; he shook my hand, murmuring:

"This is one of the finest weddings I have ever seen, and God knows that I have seen a tremendous number of them!"

Madame Giraud, who had been obliged to leave the large table when the other ladies rose, walked behind her husband and children at that moment, with an enormous reticule hanging on her arm. While pretending to pass the gentlemen what they wanted, I saw that she kept opening the bag and thrusting cakes, biscuit, and even pie crust into it. Giraud, seeing that I had noticed his wife's manœuvring, said to her angrily, as she was trying to force some macaroons into her bag:

"What on earth are you doing, Madame Giraud? What sort of manners are these? You are putting macaroons into your bag!"

"Just for Azor, my dear, the poor beast. He is so fond of macaroons, you know. They would be wasted, so what harm does it do? I want poor Azor to have a little of the pleasure of this party."

"You know very well that I don't like such things, Madame Giraud."

I appeased Giraud, who pretended to be very angry; then I walked away, in order to leave his wife at full liberty; and she ended by making a perfect balloon of her bag.

Meanwhile, the tables were gradually deserted; many people returned to the ballroom, but many others entered their carriages, and I considered that the latter acted wisely.

The ball was more agreeable perhaps, because it was more comfortable to dance. Eugénie continued to be invited, and I must needs content myself with dancing opposite her; but there were figures in which we took each other's hands, and then how many things we said by a soft pressure! it seems that the heart, that the very soul, passes into the beloved hand which presses ours lovingly.

The ranks became thinner. My mother had gone, and Madame Dumeillan was only awaiting our departure to follow her example. It was five o'clock. The daylight was beginning to show through the windows, and to lessen the brilliancy of the candles. The number of ladies diminished every moment. I went to Eugénie's side.

"I am tired of dancing," she said, "and yet I am afraid to refuse."

"Why, it seems to me that we might venture to go now."

She lowered her eyes and made no answer. I concluded that I had done enough for others and that I might think of myself at last. I took my wife's hand and led her from the room; Madame Dumeillan followed us; we entered a carriage and drove away. We had to take Madame Dumeillan home first. It was a short distance, but it seemed very long to me. The nearer one's happiness approaches, the more intense one's impatience becomes.

We spoke but little in the mother's presence. At last we reached her house, and I alighted. Madame Dumeillan embraced her daughter; it seemed to me that their embrace was interminable. Selfish creatures that we are! it did not occur to me that that was the last embrace in which a mother would hold her daughter, still a virgin, in her arms, and that I should have all the rest of my life to enjoy my privileges as a husband.

Madame Dumeillan entered her house. I returned to the carriage, and we drove on. At last I was alone with Eugénie, with my wife. I believe that that was the sweetest moment that I have ever known; it had seemed to me that it would never arrive. I put my arms about Eugénie; she wept when she embraced her mother; but

I embraced her, and she ceased to weep, for I overwhelmed her with caresses, and unfamiliar sensations made her heart beat fast.

At last we reached my apartment, our apartment. The servant who was to live with us, and who had been in her mother's service, was waiting for us in the concierge's room, with a light; but it was broad day; we needed no service. My wife and I entered our home. I led her by the hand, I felt that she was trembling and I believe that I trembled too. It is a strange effect of happiness that it suffocates one, that it almost makes one ill.

I closed the doors and shot the bolts. I was alone with my wife! At last there was no third person with us! We were at liberty to love each other, to tell each other of our love, and to prove it!

IX

THE HONEYMOON.—BÉLAN'S WEDDING

How happiness makes the time fly! A fortnight after I became Eugénie's husband it seemed to both of us that we had been married only the day before. That fortnight had passed so rapidly! It would be very difficult for me to say how we employed the time; we had no leisure to do anything. In the first place, we rose late, we breakfasted *tête-à-tête*, and then we talked; often I held Eugénie on my knees; people can understand each other better when they are close together.

We made a multitude of plans, our conversation being often interrupted by the kisses which I stole, or which

she gave me. We were much surprised, when we glanced at the clock, to find that it was almost noon and that we had been talking for two hours. Then we had to think about dressing to go to see Madame Dumeillan, and sometimes to take a walk or drive. We continued to talk while we dressed. I would ask Eugénie to sing me a song, or to play something on the piano. If I chanced to have a visitor, or a client who kept me in my office fifteen minutes, when I came out I would find my wife already impatient at my long absence, and we would talk a few minutes more to make up to ourselves for the annoyance caused by my visitor. At last we would go out; but we always acted like school children and chose the longest way, so that it was almost dinner time when we reached my mother-in-law's. We had been to the theatre twice since we were married; we preferred that to going to parties. At the theatre we were still alone and could talk when the play was dull; but in society one is never free to do whatever one pleases. We always returned home early, and we were always glad to get home. But, I say again, the time passed like a flash.

My wife found my apartment much to her liking; she told me that it was a pleasure to her to live where I had lived as a bachelor. She often questioned me about that period of my life, and listened to my answers with interest and curiosity; but I did not tell her everything; I slurred over many episodes; for I had discovered that Eugénie was jealous. Her brow darkened when there were women in my adventures, and she often interrupted me, saying angrily:

"That's enough, hush! I don't want to know any more!"

Then I would kiss her and say:

"My dear love, I didn't know you then."

But, despite my caresses, her ill humor always lasted some minutes.

However, it was necessary that we should do something else than talk and embrace. Eugénie agreed to teach me to play on the piano, and I to give her lessons in painting. But first of all, I began her portrait. That was an occupation which took an endless time, for we were constantly distraught; when I looked at my model, and she fastened her lovely eyes upon me and smiled affectionately at me, how could I always resist the desire to kiss her? And she would pout so prettily when I failed to lay aside my brush for a long while! At that I would rise and rush to my model and embrace her. Such episodes led me to think that painters must be very self-restrained, to resist the temptations they must experience when they are painting the portrait of a young and pretty woman. A woman whom we are painting looks at us as we wish her to look; we request a very sweet glance and smile, and she exerts herself to make her expression as pleasing and amiable as possible; for a woman always desires her picture to be fascinating.

For my own part, I had never needed to resist my desires, for I had painted none but my mistresses; but when one must needs scrutinize in detail innumerable charms, and stand quietly by one's easel—ah! then, I repeat, one must be most virtuous, and that particular sort of virtue is not the characteristic quality of painters.

Despite our frequent distractions, I worked assiduously at my wife's portrait; in ten sittings it was finished, and I was delighted with my work; the likeness was striking. Eugénie herself uttered a cry of surprise when she saw herself; but she feared that I had flattered her. No; I had not painted her, to be sure, as she was in company, when she looked at everybody indifferently,

but as she was when she looked at me while I was painting her, with eyes overflowing with love. It seemed to me that I had done wisely to select that expression; for it was for myself and not for others that I had painted her portrait.

Next, I must needs paint my own; Eugénie insisted upon it. That was a much less amusing task, and I feared that it would be a long one. I had already given myself several sittings, and it seemed to me that it did not progress satisfactorily. Eugénie was not satisfied; she said:

“You have given yourself a sulky, sober look; that isn't the way you look at me.”

“My dear love, it is because it is a bore to me to look at myself.”

“Oh! wait a moment, I have an idea. I will sit beside you; then, when you look in the glass, you will see me too, and I trust, monsieur, that you will not make faces at me.”

Eugénie's idea impressed me as a charming one. Thanks to her invention, I was no longer bored when I sat for myself; for she was always there beside me, and when I looked in the mirror she was the first thing I saw; my portrait gained enormously thereby; I was able to paint myself as she wished, and she was as well pleased as I had been with hers.

I had her portrait set in a locket which I always wore; she had mine set in a bracelet which she always had on her arm. We were not content to have each other in reality, we must needs have each other's image as well; if we could have possessed each other in any other way, we would have done it. But is it a mistake to love too dearly? Her mother and mine both declared that we were unreasonable, that we were worse than lovers; but

Eugénie and I were determined never to change; we liked each other well enough as we were.

My wife insisted that I should begin to learn the piano; and I showed her how to use a brush. Those lessons were most delicious to us; and they occupied a large part of the day. I realized however that piano playing and painting would not make me eminent at the bar. Since my marriage I had neglected the Palais, and paid almost no attention to business; but when I would propose to study, to shut myself up in my office, Eugénie would detain me, saying:

“What is the use of worrying yourself, of tiring your brain over your Code and your Pandects? Are we not rich enough? Are we not happy? What is the need of your trying cases, of your tormenting yourself for other people? Stay with me, give me a lesson in painting, and don't go to the Palais.”

I could not resist my wife. My mother scolded me sometimes for what she called my laziness. Love is not laziness, but a happy love makes us unfit for anything except making love.

Three months passed almost as rapidly as the first fortnight of our married life. But I had learned to play *On Dit qu'à Quinze Ans* on the piano, and Eugénie was making rapid progress in painting. A new subject of rejoicing added to our happiness: my wife was enceinte. We leaped for joy, we danced about the room, thinking that we were to have a child. We talked of nothing else, we made no plans for the future in which our son or daughter had not a share. Good Madame Dumeillan shared our delight; my mother complimented me, but without enthusiasm, and as if it were a very trifling matter; whereas it seemed to me that it ought to mark an epoch in the world's history.

We went into society very rarely, and we had been to but two balls since our wedding. But one morning we received cards and an invitation to the wedding party of Monsieur Ferdinand de Bélan and Mademoiselle Armide de Beausire. Eugénie was not far enough advanced to fear that dancing would injure her; moreover, she promised to dance only a little; so we determined to go to Bélan's wedding, where I had an idea that we should find something to laugh at. My wife agreed with me. Bélan had been to see us twice since we were married, and Eugénie considered that he made himself rather ridiculous by his chatter and his affectations. As for the Beausire family, the little that I had seen of them seemed to me rather amusing.

The invitation included, upon a separate sheet, an intimation that we were expected to attend the breakfast also.

That was a pleasure of which we determined to deprive ourselves. We mistrusted wedding breakfasts, which are about as amusing as an amateur concert or a parlor reading; we had made up our minds to go to the ball only, when Bélan appeared in our apartment.

The little dandy bowed to the floor before my wife, which was not a difficult feat for him; then he shook hands with me and said with an air of triumph:

"Did you receive our invitations?"

"Yes, my dear fellow. First, let us congratulate you."

"I accept your congratulations with pleasure. I certainly have reason to be flattered by the preference accorded me. I had seventeen rivals, three of whom were millionaires who owned iron foundries, factories or coal mines; and two marquises, one of them with six decorations; but I beat them all; and like Cæsar, *veni, vidi, vici*. We may rely upon you, may we not?"

"Oh yes, we shall be at your ball."

"And at the breakfast?"

"As to the breakfast, we cannot promise."

"Oh! I beg your pardon, but I insist upon a promise. It would be horrid of you to fail us. We have invited only a small number of people for the morning, but most select. Two of my wife's uncles, three cousins, and five aunts, all of whom are women of my mother-in-law's type. Great heaven! my mother-in-law has done nothing but weep since our wedding day was fixed; she drenches at least four handkerchiefs a day, and she doesn't let her daughter out of her sight. That embarrasses me a little in my effusions of sentiment, but my time will come. However, you must attend all the festivities. I address my entreaties to you, madame; Henri will not refuse you."

Eugénie had not the heart to refuse; she glanced at me and we promised. Bélan thanked my wife and kissed her hand, then he asked me for two minutes in my office.

"Have you any lawsuit on hand?" I asked him when we were alone.

"No, but I want to consult you. Having just married a woman whom you adored, you will be able to tell me——"

"Tell you what?"

"I don't know just how to put it. You know that I have been, like you, a lady's man, never embarrassed in a *tête-à-tête*. I was like a flash of powder."

"Well?"

"Well, it is very strange, but with Mademoiselle de Beausire, although I adore her, the effect is entirely different. It seems to me that I dare not squeeze the end of her finger. In short, I do not feel the slightest inclination to be enterprising. I confess that that worries

me and makes me anxious; I don't sleep at night; and the nearer my wedding day approaches, the more apprehensive I feel."

"Ha! ha! Poor Bélan! nonsense! don't be afraid! Real love, love that is too ardent, sometimes produces the effect which you complain of; but it does not last. And besides, what have you to fear with your wife? You are sure that she won't escape you. She isn't like a mistress, who often refuses to give you a second assignation when she is not pleased with the first. With one's wife, what doesn't happen the first night, will happen the second."

"True; it might not happen till the eighth even. You make me feel a little easier in my mind. You see, *Made-moiselle de Beausire*—such a well-bred young woman as she is—isn't like a *grisette*. Oh! with a *grisette*, it goes all alone.—And then the mother-in-law is always there!"

"I imagine that she won't be there on your wedding night."

"Faith! I wouldn't swear to it. She does nothing but talk about not being parted from her daughter, and says that she can't sleep away from her. I believe that she means to sleep in a closet adjoining our bedroom."

"That will be very amusing for you!"

"It is that sort of thing that keeps going through my head and takes away my natural ardor. But no matter, between now and my wedding I will have everything I eat flavored with vanilla; I will even have some put in my soup. Adieu, my dear Blémont. We rely upon you. Your wedding was very fine, but just wait till you see mine. That's all I have to say."

Bélan went away. So we were simply compelled to attend the breakfast; we had promised. However, perhaps it would be more amusing than we thought.

Indeed, there are parties which are so tiresome that they are actually comical. The only remedy was to make the best of things; they say that there is a good side to everything.

Eugénie gave her attention to her dresses; for she must have two for that day. I urged her not to lace herself too tightly; you can guess why. A woman should think about being a mother rather than try to make herself slender; but that is what she often forgets.

Bélan's great day arrived. A carriage came for us, the coachman, and the groom behind, both dressed in apricot livery. I was compelled to admit that that feature already excelled my wedding, and I expected to see some magnificent things. We were to meet at Madame de Beausire's, where I had never been. It was an old house, on Rue de la Roquette. We passed an old concierge; we ascended an old staircase, upon which rose leaves had been scattered profusely. I was sure that that was an idea of Bélan, and I did not consider it a very happy one, for it nearly caused my wife to fall; but I caught her in time, and she said with a smile:

"We were married without rose leaves, my dear."

"Yes, my dear love; it was less romantic, but there was no slipping."

We entered an apartment of extraordinary height, on the first floor. It was so high that I could hardly distinguish the mouldings of the ceiling. We were announced by an old servant, who seemed to have been weeping; perhaps that was a custom of the house. We were ushered into an immense salon, where Bélan, who was doing the honors, produced the impression of a dwarf amid a lot of Patagonians. We discovered a row of old faces, a sort of continuation of the tapestry of which Madame de Beausire had given me a specimen.

The men were solemn, sententious and pretentious; the women stiff, affected and painted. There were a few people of our own set, but only a few. I concluded that Bélan had not obtained permission to invite many of his acquaintances. The poor fellow did not seem at his ease amid the Beausire family; he was afraid to be jovial, he dreaded to be dismal; he hovered about his new kindred, who did not talk for fear of compromising their dignity.

The groom was delighted when we arrived; he felt more at ease with us.

"You will see my wife presently," he said to us; "just now she is with her mother, who is finishing her toilet, weeping."

"What! is your mother-in-law weeping still?"

"Yes, my friend, that woman is a regular fountain."

"But what is she weeping for?"

"Grief at separating from her daughter. And yet she does not propose to separate from her, for she declares that she will sleep in the same room with us."

"In the same room? Ha! ha! that is rather strong."

"I swear to you that that is what she says. Indeed, I believe that she hoped that I would not sleep with my wife; but on my word, despite all my respect for Madame de Beausire, I refused to give in on that point, and I think that Armide was glad of it. But here come the ladies."

The bride entered, escorted on one side by an old aunt with a nose like a snail's shell, and on the other by her mother, who, with her tall, spare figure, her red eyes, and her leaden complexion, really looked like a ghost.

From the sighs heaved by those ladies, one would have thought that they were leading a second Iphigenia to the sacrifice. The relations came forward and delivered congratulations of the same style as their costumes. In

the midst of it all, the bridegroom was the person to whom the least attention was paid. When he addressed his wife, she made no answer; when he turned to his mother-in-law, she took out her handkerchief and turned her back on him; and if he accosted any of the relations, they pretended to pay no attention to him.

We started for the church, each man escorting a lady; I gave my arm to my wife; for I did not see why I should deprive myself of that pleasure in favor of those creatures. We went downstairs, in the conventional order, Bélan at the head, escorting his mother-in-law. The rose leaves produced a wonderful impression.

"This is lovely!" said an old aunt; "it's like a procession!"

"It's an idea of mine!" cried Bélan; "I thought of it last night, while thinking of my wedding; and I am delighted that——"

Bélan had reached this point in his speech, when a tall cousin, who was escorting the bride, slipped down two steps and fell, dragging the fair Armide after him.

Shrieks arose on all sides. Thank heaven, Armide had fallen decently, and had made no exposé for the benefit of the company, which would have been most unpleasant for the husband, who hoped to be the first to behold her charms; and which would probably have made the mother-in-law sob anew.

The bride was quickly assisted to her feet, and the tall cousin rose unassisted, uttering a most vulgar oath and exclaiming:

"The devil take the rose leaves! A man must be an infernal fool to scatter them on a staircase! I have hurt my scrotum."

Bélan was speechless with confusion at the accident due to his idea.

"Monsieur de Bélan, you must have all this swept away," said the mother-in-law; and the bridegroom replied with a low bow:

"Yes, Madame de Beausire, I will look after it."

Our betrothed were united in a small church in the Marais. Nothing extraordinary took place during the ceremony, except that the mother-in-law used two handkerchiefs, and that Bélan made horrible faces in his attempts to weep with her, but without success.

I had hoped that the breakfast would be at a restaurant; but we were bidden to return to the mother-in-law's. That certainly required courage. Eugénie and I looked at each other, vowing, albeit a little late, that we would never be caught in such a scrape again.

The bridegroom went ahead, doubtless to have his rose leaves swept away. I was sure that he would do the sweeping himself rather than expose himself to his mother-in-law's wrath.

A long table was laid in the dining-room. We took our seats; I was between the old aunt with a nose like a snail's shell and the tall cousin who had fallen so hard on the stairway; my wife was a mile away from me, between two old uncles with lace cuffs and curly wigs. How we were likely to enjoy ourselves!

I expected to see Giraud and his wife at the breakfast, for Giraud had been declaring everywhere that it was he who had arranged Bélan's marriage. But evidently the mother-in-law had not deemed them worthy of that honor, and we should not see them until evening.

The bride kept her eyes on the floor and did not eat. The mother-in-law looked at her daughter, wiped her eyes, and seemed not to realize that there was anybody there. We sat at the table two minutes without touching anything, no one having been requested to serve. Bélan,

uncertain whether he was expected to do the honors, glanced at his wife and his mother-in-law in turn, and faltered:

"Who is to serve? Does Madame de Beausire desire me to serve?"

But Madame de Beausire replied only by blowing her nose and sighing.

I looked at my wife; I had such a mad desire to laugh that I dropped my knife and fork on the floor, so that I might indulge it a little while fumbling under the table. I chose to be considered awkward rather than discourteous.

At last an old uncle, who had not come to the wedding simply to look at the dishes, although that would have been more dignified than to eat them, drew an enormous pie toward him and gave the signal for the attack. We decided to breakfast, notwithstanding Madame de Beausire's sighs; but we did it with a decorum and gravity which were interrupted only by the noise of the plates and the forks.

When the first edge of the appetite was dulled, some of the uncles and cousins were pleased to indulge in various significant phrases, dwelling upon every word they uttered, as if they considered that necessary in order that we should understand them. Bélan put in a word here and there, but it was not noticed. I discovered that he was trying to lead the conversation around to the subject of poetry. I felt certain that he had written some, or had had some written, and that he did not know how to set to work to recite it. Whenever he reached the subject, an uncle or an aunt would cut him short by speaking of something else. I felt sorry for him and said:

"My dear Bélan, has anyone written any poetry for your wedding?"

"Yes, just so; I myself have dashed off something in honor of this day, and with your permission, I will——"

"What! do you mean to say that you are going to sing, Monsieur de Bélan?" cried Madame de Beausire, with an almost threatening glance at her son-in-law. "For shame, monsieur! what sort of people have you lived with, where it was customary to sing at the table?"

"I never had any idea of singing, mother-in-law; nor have I any desire to. I meant simply to recite some verses,—verses which do not in the least degree resemble a song."

"Verses at a wedding! You should leave that to the *Almanach des Muses*," said the tall cousin, who sat beside me, and who still bore the groom a grudge on account of his fall on the stairs. At the same instant Madame de Beausire shrieked aloud:

"You are pale, Armide! Don't you feel well, my child?"

I had not noticed that the bride had changed color; but as her mother told her that she had, Armide probably thought it best not to feel well. She passed her hand over her eyes and said in a faltering tone:

"No, I feel——"

Her mother did not allow her to finish. She sprang to her feet, crying:

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Armide is dying! We must carry her to her bed."

Instantly there was a general uprising. The aunt who was at my side thrust her elbow in my face in her attempt to rise quickly in order to go to the assistance of her niece, who thereupon concluded that she had best be ill altogether. While they were taking Armide to her room, and Bélan was running hither and thither like a madman,

I went to my wife, took her hand and led her to the door, saying:

"This is quite enough for one morning."

Bélan overtook us on the stairs, and called out to us:

"What! going already? Why, my wife will come to herself in a minute; I am not worried about her health; my mother-in-law is forever telling her that she is going to die, when she has no idea of doing anything of the kind."

"We have an engagement."

"Until this evening, then."

"The ball is not to be at your mother-in-law's, is it?"

"No, at Lointier's. It will be magnificent."

"We will be there."

How glad we were to be alone again! We had plenty to laugh about, as we passed in review the original creatures whom we had met; and although my wife is not malicious, she was fully alive to the absurdities of the company.

We had promised to attend the ball, so we had no choice but to go; moreover, it was impossible that it should be so dreary a function as the breakfast; and then it was to take place in the same salons in which we had given ours, and we were not sorry to see them once more.

We went late, because we hoped to find the dancing well under way; but we were surprised to find the salons almost empty, and only two quadrilles in progress, so that everybody had plenty of room to dance. And yet it was after eleven o'clock.

Bélan came to meet us. His face was a yard long, and he said to me:

"It is most annoying: my mother-in-law would not allow me to invite more than thirty people; for she said that, with her family and acquaintances, that would be

quite enough; and you see how much empty space there is. I am aware that the party is very select, but a few more people would do no harm."

"One result, my dear Bélan, is that it is much more comfortable to dance."

"Yes, that is so; the dancers will gain by it."

"And madame is no longer ill?"

"No, that didn't last. But now it is my mother-in-law's turn to have fits of suffocation. Just look at her eyes; she's a regular rabbit; she makes me sick. She is crying now because my wife dances every contradance; she declares that her daughter will be killed. Great heaven, what an emotional creature she is!"

"But I don't see the Giraud family here, and that surprises me, for of course you invited them?"

"Mon Dieu! my dear Blémont, don't speak of it. I was distressed to death, but my mother-in-law declared that the Girauds had manners which would be entirely out of place with her family, and she would not allow me to invite them."

"But Madame de Beausire used to go to their house, if I remember aright?"

"Yes, but since the little Giraud girl stuck her tongue out at her, she has sworn that she will never put her foot inside their door."

"I thought that Giraud was instrumental in arranging your marriage?"

"True, he did start the business."

"And you haven't invited him? He will never forgive you as long as he lives."

"What could I do? My mother-in-law—But excuse me, I believe that she is motioning to me."

We left Bélan, and I danced with my Eugénie. We were happy to dance together, to be again in those rooms

which had been the scene of our own wedding. Our eyes expressed love and contentment. Surely we looked more as if we were at a wedding than anybody else there.

To dance is the best thing that one can do at a ball where one knows nobody. All those Beausires, who stalked solemnly about the quadrilles, and the old aunts who sat against the wall, seemed almost displeased to see other people apparently enjoying themselves. I felt sure that they considered us very ill-bred.

Eugénie proposed to me that we should go before the supper; but I preferred to remain, because I expected that there would be some amusing scenes at the close of the festivity. The supper was not served as mine was; the ladies alone were seated, and the men had to stand behind them. Madame de Beausire insisted upon having it so, because it was much less jolly than sitting at small tables.

The feast lasted a very short time. Madame de Beausire gave the signal by rising, and the other ladies had no choice but to follow her example. I heard one old aunt mutter as she rose: "This is ridiculous; I didn't have time to finish my chicken wing."

As the fatal moment drew near, Madame de Beausire's eyes became more and more full of tears. At last, when the dancing drew to a close, Bélan approached his Armide and suggested that they should go; whereupon Madame de Beausire rushed between them, sobbing, and threw her arms about her daughter.

"You shall not separate us, monsieur!" she cried.

Bélan stood as if turned to stone before his mother-in-law. The kinsfolk surrounded them, and I heard the uncles and cousins say to one another:

"That little fellow is behaving in the most indecent way. It makes me ill to have him come into our family."

The aunts and the old maids had led Madame de Beausire away, and she left the restaurant with her daughter, while Bélan remained. He saw us and came to bid us good-night, faltering:

“I have let my wife and her mother go before, because, you know, they have to put the bride to bed; and of course I cannot be there.”

“My dear Bélan, I am afraid that Madame de Beausire will make another scene to-night.”

“Oh, no! At all events, if she does, I will show my spirit.”

We drove away, and as we returned home, Eugénie and I agreed that a man is always very foolish to enter a family which thinks that it does him much honor by allying itself with him. If chance has willed that he should be born in a lower class, he should, by his intellect or his character, show himself superior to those who try to humiliate him.

X

A QUARREL.—THE FIRST VEXATION

A few days after Bélan's wedding, we received a visit from Monsieur and Madame Giraud. I divined what brought them, and in truth they were hardly seated before Giraud exclaimed:

“You must have been greatly surprised not to see us at Bélan's wedding?”

“In fact,” added Madame Giraud, “it made an impression on everybody. It was so terribly vulgar! So

extraordinary! Just think of it! It was at our house that they met, and it was Giraud who took the first steps, who sounded Madame de Beausire, and who enumerated to her the young man's property and good qualities; and yet we were not invited to the breakfast, or even to the ball! It's an outrage!"

"More than that, it was indecent!" cried Giraud; "and if my wife hadn't restrained me, I would have demanded satisfaction."

"No, no; people would have thought that we cared about a wedding party; but thank God! we have more of them than we want. By the way, they say that that one was very dismal and tiresome!"

"Why, it was not very lively," said Eugénie.

"Ah! yours was the lovely one, my dear Madame Blémont, and managed with such taste and such profusion! I confess that I had thirteen ices; salvers kept passing me, and I forgot myself."

"Yes, that was a charming wedding," said Giraud; "but they tell me that at Bélan's there weren't enough people to form two quadrilles of twelve, and that they were almost all outlandish creatures of the last century. And that old Beausire woman did nothing but cry. And then that night—do you know what happened?"

"No, we don't know."

"Well, I know all about it, because I have a maid who used to live in the house where the Beausires live, and who still has friends there. Well, that night the mother-in-law refused to leave her daughter. When the husband arrived, Madame de Beausire sobbed so that she woke the neighbors. Bélan lost his temper, and they had a terrible scene; finally, in a rage, he went to bed in a little closet where they keep coal, and the next morning he came out looking like a coal heaver! Poor fellow! If

he doesn't look out, those two women will shut him up in a foot-warmer, and feed him through the holes when he's a good boy.—Ha! ha! It is too funny!" said Madame Giraud. "However, I won't give him a year to be—you know what—and he will well have deserved it."

Monsieur and Madame Giraud took leave of us, renewing the assurances of their friendship, and they probably went about to all their acquaintances to do the same thing.

As her pregnancy advanced, my wife felt called upon to attend to a thousand little duties which made it necessary for her to neglect music and painting. Moreover, her health was often poor, and she needed a great deal of rest; the result was that I had much more time to work in my office. Besides, the title of father, which I hoped soon to have, made me reflect more reasonably than I had done for some months past. Although our fortune was large enough for Eugénie and myself, it would cease to be large enough if we should have several children, and on their account it would be well for me to think of increasing it.

Bélan made his wedding call with his wife, who had lost none of her stiffness and primness since her marriage. I found that the new husband's eyes were as red as his mother-in-law's. Perhaps he too wept sometimes to gratify Madame de Beausire. He was so attentive, so devoted to his Armide, and he waited upon her with such humility, that he seemed like his wife's servant.

We returned their visit ceremoniously, and we did not go again; we remembered their breakfast.

Since I had given my attention to business once more and had returned to the practice of my profession, my mother said that we had become reasonable and that I now had the aspect of a married man. I do not know what aspect I may have had, but I know that I considered

that we were becoming altogether too sedate; we no longer played together or fooled the time away, as we did in the early days of our marriage.

The longed-for moment arrived at last. Eugénie made me the father of a daughter whom I considered a sweet little thing. My wife was disappointed for a moment, for she had hoped for a boy and had convinced herself that it would be a boy. For my own part, I was quite as well satisfied with a girl. I comforted Eugénie. My daughter, to whom her godmother, Madame Dumeillan, gave the name of Henriette, was placed in the charge of a stout, motherly nurse, who lived only three leagues from Paris, so that we could go often to see her. My wife soon recovered her health, but she retained some unevenness of temper and some caprices; what she decided to do in the morning she sometimes did not want to do at night. I am extremely good-natured, but I like to have people do what they have planned to do, and not act like weather vanes. My wife would express a wish to go to walk; and when I called her for that purpose, she would have changed her mind because it was necessary to change her dress; thereupon I would return laughing to my office.

"If you make up your mind to go," I would say to her; "you must come and call me."

As I passed through Rue du Temple one day, I heard someone call my name. It was Ernest, who was behind me. I was overjoyed to see him again and we shook hands warmly.

"Is it really you, my dear Ernest? Mon Dieu! How long it is since we saw each other!"

"Yes, more than a year. I suppose that you are married now; for you were just about to marry your dear Eugénie the last time that I saw you."

"Yes, I am married and I am a father; I wasted no time, you see."

"That is splendid. Do you still live in the same apartment?"

"Yes; my wife likes it very much. And you?"

"We live in this street, only a step or two from here. I gave you our address, and you promised to come to see us; but you have forgotten your neighbors of the attic."

"I plead guilty; the change that has taken place in my situation is my excuse."

"If you want us to forgive you altogether, you must come up and bid my wife good-morning. I say my wife, although we are not married. But for the benefit of concierges and strangers I feel bound to call her my wife; that is a sacrifice to the proprieties. After all, what difference is there between us and married people? Simply a signature on a great book! And that signature, and the oath, and all the promises made before men, do not make people behave any better."

"I am entirely of your opinion."

"At all events, we are very happy; we love each other as dearly as ever, and we snap our fingers at evil tongues."

"You are quite right, my dear Ernest, one should live for oneself and not for other people."

"Now that I am prosperous, I don't care what my parents say; I owe nothing to anybody and I am as happy as a king, I mean, happier than a king. But come on; Marguerite will be very glad to see you; we often speak of you."

I followed Ernest; he led me into a very attractive house, and we went up three flights; he rang, and my former neighbor opened the door. She uttered a cry of surprise when she saw me.

"Ah! it is Monsieur Blémont! What a miracle!"

"Parbleu! if he has come, my dear love, it is simply because I met him and brought him by force; but for that, you wouldn't have seen him yet."

"Ah! how wicked it is to forget one's good friends, one's neighbors!"

"Mon Dieu! madame, you see—that——"

"Ha! ha! he is getting mixed up; he is ashamed of his wrongdoing," said Ernest, laughingly; "we must be generous and say nothing more to him about it."

They ushered me into a bedroom which served as a salon; it was not magnificent, but there was everything that was necessary, and there was an atmosphere of order and of neatness which did much credit to the mistress of the house.

Madame Ernest, for I could call her by no other name, was a little stouter than of old; she was most attractive, and her eyes and all her features expressed a contentment, a happiness which added to her charm. They made me sit down, and we talked of the evenings we had passed together in the attic, long ago.

"Are you married to your Eugénie?" asked Madame Ernest.

"Yes, madame, thirteen months ago."

"You must be very happy! for you were very much in love with her, and she loved you dearly too."

"Yes, madame."

"Have you any children?"

"What a foolish creature!" said Ernest; "do you suppose that they have had six or seven in thirteen months?"

"I mean a child."

"Yes, I have had a little daughter for two months and a half."

"Ah! you are luckier than we are. I should like so much to have a child; and since my miscarriage—But this time I have hopes."

And the little woman glanced at Ernest with a smile; he smiled back at her, saying:

"Are such things mentioned before people?"

"Oh! never mind! What harm is there in hoping to be a mother?—Besides, Monsieur Blémont isn't 'people;' he is our friend; he proved it that night that I was sick.—But come and see what pretty rooms we have."

The little woman showed me over her apartments, which consisted of three rooms and a small dressing-room. She stopped in front of the fireplace in her bedroom and said:

"Do you see? We have a clock!"

"Hush, Marguerite!" said Ernest.

"No, no, I am going to speak. Ought I to pretend to be proud with Monsieur Henri, who knew me when I was so poor and unhappy? I am sure that it pleases him to see that we have all these things."

"Indeed, you are quite right, madame; and you judge me aright in thinking that I am happy in your happiness."

"I was right, you see. I also have a woman who comes in in the morning, to do the heavy work. Ernest insisted upon it, because he declares that I am not strong enough."

"How interesting to monsieur to know that!"

"Yes, yes, it is interesting.—He is always scolding me, because he says that I am ignorant of the proprieties. Bless my soul! it isn't my fault; it seems to me that one may well talk to her friends about what interests her; I am so happy!"

And Marguerite began to dance about the room; then she ran and threw her arms about Ernest's neck and

kissed him. She was as much a child as ever; but she was not yet eighteen. I prayed that she might retain that happy disposition for a long time to come.

The time passes quickly when one is in pleasant company. I suddenly discovered that it was long past five o'clock; and my wife would be expecting me to dinner, and I was to take her that evening to see a new play! I bade my young friends good-bye. I promised to go again to see them and I urged Ernest to come upstairs when he passed my house.

It rarely happened that I was not at home some time before the dinner hour; and that day we were to dine before five o'clock, in order to have plenty of time to go to the theatre. I found Eugénie at the window, anxious and impatient.

"Where on earth have you been? It is almost half-past five; you never come home so late."

"My dear love, I met a friend,—one of my old friends."

"Should a man's friends cause him to forget his wife?"

"I didn't think about the time."

"And you didn't think of me, who have been waiting for you and who did not know what to think."

"Nonsense! come to dinner."

"But tell me, where have you been?"

"I will tell you at the table."

We sat down, and I told my wife the story of my acquaintance with Ernest and Marguerite. I was obliged to begin some way back, in order to explain to her how it happened that I went up to the attic room. Eugénie, who listened at first with interest, became thoughtful, and her brow darkened. I finished my story, and still she was silent for a long time. I ate my dinner, but she did not

eat. She continued to keep silent, and it vexed me at last.

“Why don’t you eat?”

“Because I am not hungry.”

“And why are you sulky with me?”

“Sulky! I am not sulky.”

“You don’t say a word; is that the way we ordinarily act when we are together?”

“I am thinking about your former neighbor, about your friend’s mistress, whom you used to go to see in her room under the eaves.”

“I went to see her when Ernest was there.”

“Oh! you were always sure to find him, were you?”

“Yes, for I seldom went except in the evening, and Ernest was almost always there then.”

“Almost always!”

“Eugénie, I have told you the truth; you would do very wrong to believe anything else.”

“But you seem to be so infatuated with this little Marguerite. You say that she is so pretty.”

“In the first place, I did not say that she was pretty. But even if she were, that isn’t what I admired in her; it was her love, her deep affection for her lover.”

“Oh, yes! that was what led you up to the eaves!”

“Yes, it was. Why do you think ill of a person whom you do not know?”

“Oh! you did so many things when you were a bachelor! You had so many mistresses!”

“A very good reason why I did not need to turn to somebody’s else, who would not have listened to me if I had.”

“You may very well have known Mademoiselle Marguerite before she knew her Monsieur Ernest, as you were her neighbor.”

"If I had dreamed that you would imagine all this, I would not have mentioned Ernest or his wife."

"His wife! She isn't his wife."

"It is practically the same thing, as they live together."

"Such people are always very queer, and that woman would not be received in decent society."

"Queer! What foolish prejudices! People in what is called good society won't receive a woman who has lived a long time with the only man whom she ever loved; whose only care, whose only glory consists in making him happy; who goes out with no one but him, adorns herself for no one else, knows no pleasure without him; but they will welcome and make much of the woman who ruins her husband by extravagance, who does not even take the trouble to conceal her love-affairs, who goes about with no one but her cicisbeo. And all because those women are married, forsooth! Upon my word, it does great honor to society!"

"Mon Dieu! how you flare up, monsieur!"

"Because I cannot tolerate injustice, and because this particular injustice is often perpetrated in society. For my own part, I tell you that I shall always rise above such prejudices, and that I should be very glad to welcome Ernest and his wife at my house."

"I thank you, monsieur, but I trust that you will not do so."

"If you knew them, I am sure that you would not talk like this."

"I have no desire to make their acquaintance; it is quite enough for you to be Mademoiselle Marguerite's intimate friend."

"Great heaven! how absurdly you talk, Eugénie!"

"And she used to live in this house?"

“To be sure.”

“I am no longer surprised that you are so attached to your apartment.”

I angrily threw down my knife and fork and rose from the table, saying:

“Let us talk no more about it, for you will end with making me angry too. Are you ready? It is time to go to the theatre.”

“I don’t want to go.”

“And this morning you were looking forward to it. What is the meaning of this new whim?”

“It isn’t a whim; I don’t care about going to the theatre; I don’t want to go out.”

“As you please. Then I will go without you.”

I took my hat and went out, closing the door rather violently. One absolutely must vent one’s ill humor on something.

I was really distressed. That was the first quarrel I had had with my wife. It pained me all the more because I knew that I was not in the wrong; and when a person feels that he deserves neither reproof nor blame, he is doubly incensed with those who reprove or blame him.

To think of my being insulted by Eugénie! A few months before I could not have believed that that could happen. To think of being hurt and grieved by her! But it was jealousy that led her astray, that excited her. I tried to find excuses for her. We always try to find excuses for those whom we love; we should be so unhappy if we could not excuse them.

I found but little enjoyment at the theatre; there were times however, when, engrossed by the play, which was very pretty, I abandoned myself to the pleasure it afforded me; but the memory of my quarrel with my wife

soon returned to my mind; it was as if a weight had resumed its place upon my chest; it embarrassed me and prevented me from enjoying myself. What a child I was! after all, it was a most trivial dispute; I was foolish to think that a husband and wife could always agree. Yet I did think so; I believed it. That quarrel, trivial though it was, caused me much distress, because it was the first, and because it destroyed one of my illusions.

My wife was in bed when I went home. The next day we did not mention our dispute of the day before. We were not on bad terms, and yet everything was not right between us. Eugénie was colder and less talkative than usual; there was none of the delightful unreserve of former days. But I could not ask her pardon when I had done nothing. Let madame sulk, if that amuses her, I thought; I will seem not to notice it.

A fortnight passed thus, during which I went once to Ernest's; but I was careful not to tell my wife; one must needs have secrets from people who see evil in everything.

One morning, Eugénie said to me:

"We must see about finding a new apartment."

"A new apartment? what for, pray?"

"Why, to move into, naturally."

"Do you mean that you want to leave this apartment, which you like so much?"

"Oh! I can't endure it now! and if I had known all that I know now, we certainly would have taken another when we were married."

"Known all that you know? Are you going to begin again?"

"You can't deny that this was the place where you knew Mademoiselle Marguerite; everybody in the house knows it, and you cannot certainly think it is pleasant for me to live here."

"Everybody in the house knows that I used to talk to my neighbor; and everybody also knows that I was not her lover."

"Oh! that isn't what people say—even the concierges."

"What, Eugénie! do you talk with the concierges?"

"No, not I; but our maid talks with them sometimes; that is natural enough. And I know, monsieur, that Mademoiselle Marguerite was not content to receive visits from you; she used to come to your room."

"That is false, madame."

"You won't admit it, of course not. You could not say that she used to come here with her lover."

"Oh, yes! I do remember now that she came once to my room, just once, one morning, to ask me if I had seen her cat which she had lost."

"Her cat! ha! ha! a charming excuse! That virtuous young woman goes to a bachelor's room to look for her cat!"

"I swear to you that that is the truth!"

"And another time she came to ask about her dog, I suppose?"

I made no reply, for I felt that I should lose my temper, and in such a case it is wiser to hold one's tongue. Eugénie saw perhaps that she had gone too far, for after a moment she said to me gently:

"We shall have to move anyway when our daughter returns from her nurse's; this apartment will be too small then. Why should we wait?"

"This apartment suits me, madame, and I propose to remain here."

I was not in the habit of resisting my wife; but her suspicions concerning my friendship with Madame Ernest made me angry, and it annoyed me to think of leaving my apartment.

Eugénie did not insist; for several days we were on cool terms, and the question of apartments was not mentioned. I saw plainly enough that my wife longed to speak of it, but she dared not. At last I reflected that, after all, the neighbors and concierges and gossips might well have made remarks; such people care for nothing except slandering their neighbors. They had seen me go up to the young woman's room and they might have thought that Ernest was not there.

Why should I force my wife to listen forever to the insinuations of those people? The apartment was distasteful to her. Besides, one must needs do something in order to have peace. Peace! ah, yes! I was beginning to realize that peace is a precious thing, which does not always dwell in families.

"If you will dress at once," I said to Eugénie one morning, "we will go together to look at apartments."

At that she threw herself into my arms and kissed me affectionately; she had recovered all her sunny humor of earlier days. To make the ladies amiable, all that is necessary is to do everything that they want.

XI

A SCENE

We hired an apartment on Boulevard Montmartre; it was rather expensive, but very attractive. We could not take possession for three months. Meanwhile, my wife was in a most delightful mood, save for the petty discussions which occur between the most closely attached couples; for after all, we are not perfect. My

Eugénie was as she used to be in the earlier days of our married life; she never mentioned Ernest or Marguerite, and I did not tell her that I went sometimes to see them.

One lovely winter morning we determined to go to see our daughter. We could not bear to wait until spring to embrace our little Henriette. No sooner had we formed the plan than I went out to hire a cabriolet for the whole day. I provided a cold chicken, a pie and a bottle of bordeaux; things which are difficult to procure at a nurse's house, but which are never out of place anywhere. Eugénie wore a large bonnet which protected her from the wind, and a large, thick cloak; I wrapped myself in my own cloak, simply leaving my hands free to drive; and we started for Livry.

It was a beautiful drive, the air was sharp, but the sun shone brightly. And we had, what was better still, love and good spirits for travelling companions; so that we made the journey merrily enough. When my hands were too cold, Eugénie took the reins and drove for me.

We sang and laughed and ate in our cabriolet; we were our own masters; there were only we two; no tiresome coachman behind to grumble if we went too fast or if we whipped the horse, or to sneer as he counted the kisses we exchanged. It is so pleasant for people who love each other to be alone!

We drove along the outskirts of the famous forest of Bondy, which is much less famous to-day, because there are fewer thieves in the forest and more in the salons. In due time we reached Livry, a village where there are almost no cottages, a town where there are few houses. We found our nurse's house, and made a triumphal entry into a yard full of manure, mud and pools of water; what the peasants call *piqueux*. My wife had already alighted from the carriage; she had spied the nurse with

a little one in her arms; and she ran to her, and seized the child, crying:

“This is my daughter! I know her!”

For my part, I confess that I should never have known her. When my daughter left us, she was three days old; and I consider that at that age all children resemble each other. She was now four months; one could begin to distinguish something; but I should never have been able to tell whether she was my daughter, or the nurse's child, who was three months older; mothers never make a mistake.

Eugénie examined her daughter admiringly and insisted that she looked like me already. With the best will in the world, I could detect no resemblance; and although I felt that I should love my daughter dearly, frankly, I could as yet see nothing adorable about her.

What I admired was the corpulence and robust health of our nurse. That woman surely had strength enough to nurse four children at once; and as I contemplated her fat cheeks and her broad chest, I said, like Diderot: “One could kiss her for six weeks without kissing her twice in the same place.”

I had done well to bring eatables, for we found nothing there but eggs, milk and pork; rustic delicacies, but not succulent. I ate with the peasants, while my wife held her daughter and crooned over her. Eugénie said that I was a glutton, that I preferred the pie to my daughter. I was very fond of both. I admit that I was unable to arouse any enthusiasm for a little creature who could not speak and could not do anything but make faces; but my heart told me that I should be none the less a good father, for all that. Exaggeration leads one wide of the truth, and enthusiasm does not demonstrate real feeling.

We went to walk about the neighborhood. We did not admire the verdure, because it was freezing weather; but we discovered some lovely spots and views, which must have been delightful in summer; and some fields too, where it must have been very pleasant to roll about when the grass had grown.

We returned and sat down in front of a snapping fire; one can warm oneself so luxuriantly in front of the huge fireplaces that we find in the country; they are the only things that our excellent ancestors had which I regret.

We ate again, for we always return to that at last, and always with pleasure; then we embraced the child, the nurse, everybody, and returned to the cabriolet. It was almost five o'clock, and in winter darkness comes on early.

At night, the cold seemed more intense. Eugénie and I sat close together. My cloak, which was very large, was wrapped around us both; we tried in every way to keep warm. Eugénie sat on my knee and drove; I made no objection; it was almost dark. Suddenly the horse stopped, and Eugénie and I concluded that we were off the road. I had only a very vague idea where we were; but the horse, finding that he was no longer guided by the reins, had turned aside, and was standing across the road, facing the ditch.

We laughed over our plight and our distraction, which might have landed us in the ditch. But luckily our horse was not in love. I took the reins again, I steered the carriage into the right road, and we returned to Paris, thinking that it had been a very short day, and fully determined to go to see the nurse again.

A few days after this visit to Livry, on returning home, I found Ernest in the salon talking with my wife. I had often urged him to come to see me, and he had never done so before. I was greatly surprised to find that my

Eugénie was making herself very agreeable; I feared that she would treat him coldly at least. But I soon understood why she had not laid aside her usual gracious manner: Ernest had given his family name only, and I had not mentioned that to my wife.

"Here is one of your friends, Monsieur Firmin, who has been waiting for you a long while," said Eugénie when I appeared. "I have never had the pleasure of seeing monsieur before. I think that he was not at our wedding."

"That is true," I said, taking his hand. "I confess that—that I forgot him. On that day a man is permitted to have a poor memory."

I was a little embarrassed. I dared not ask Ernest about his wife, for I was certain that Eugénie did not know that her visitor was the lover of my former neighbor. I began hastily to talk about the theatre and literature; I led Ernest to his favorite ground, and he told me all the news of the wings. But suddenly he exclaimed:

"I was very sorry not to be at home when you called the day before yesterday. My wife told me that you waited for me a long while."

"Is monsieur married?" Eugénie instantly inquired.

Ernest replied by simply bowing. Then he continued:

"I was all the more vexed, because I had a box at the Vaudeville to give you, which perhaps would have entertained madame."

Eugénie bowed, and I tried to lead the conversation back to the theatre; but Ernest, having no suspicion of my apprehension, soon said to me:

"Marguerite, who used to be so fond of the theatre, is beginning to tire of it; I take her so often!"

At the name of Marguerite, my wife turned pale; then she said to me with a forced smile:

"Can it be that monsieur is Monsieur Ernest?"

"Yes, this is Monsieur Ernest Firmin, whom I have mentioned to you many times."

"Ah yes! I know, and whose *wife* used to live in this house."

Ernest bowed again. I held my peace, but I felt that I was blushing, for Eugénie had said the word *wife* in a tone of irony which hurt me. There was malice in it, and I could not understand how she could make malicious remarks to a person who had never injured her.

Luckily Ernest, I thought, did not detect my wife's meaning. He continued to talk of literature and theatres. Eugénie did not say another word, and her manner was as cold as it had been affable when I arrived. I carried on the conversation with Ernest. At last he rose and said good-bye; and, as he took leave of my wife, he offered to send her tickets sometimes if it would afford her pleasure. Eugénie replied that she did not care for the theatre; but that reply was made in such a contemptuous and discourteous tone that Ernest could not fail to be hurt by it. However, he simply glanced at me, half smiled, pressed my hand significantly and took his leave.

I expected a quarrel or scene of some sort; for I was beginning to discover that when one is married, one must often expect something. Eugénie did not say a word, but went to her room; I let her go and betook myself to my study. I passed the rest of the day without seeing her.

But, at dinner time, annoyed that she did not leave her room, I decided to go in search of her. I found her sitting in a chair and weeping bitterly. I ran to her and tried to kiss her, but she pushed me away.

"What does all this mean, Eugénie? Why are you crying? What is it that causes your sorrow?"

"You, monsieur."

"I?"

"Ah! you make me very unhappy!"

"I make you unhappy? I must confess that I did not expect such a reproach. When I try to gratify all your desires, all your tastes; when I have no other will than yours, I make you unhappy! Upon my word, women are most unjust! What would you say, pray, Eugénie, if you had a scolding, capricious, dissipated, or gambling husband?"

"Mon Dieu! I am well aware, monsieur, that a husband thinks that he has done his duty when he has given his wife the bonnet and shawl that she wants; but for my part, I should prefer that you should have all the faults that you just mentioned, if you would be faithful to me."

"And you reproach me with being unfaithful! you address such a reproach as that to me!"

"Do you dare to deny that you have been going to see your former neighbor, this Madame Ernest?"

"No, madame, I have never denied it; why should I deny anything when I have done nothing wrong?"

"Still, you have not told me of it, and but for that gentleman's call, I should not have known it."

"I have not told you of it because your absurd suspicions obliged me to keep it secret. I felt sure that you would discover something wrong in it; so that it was useless for me to tell you a thing which can hardly be said to concern you."

"Ah! so it doesn't concern me that you go to make love to other women! What a horrible thing to say!"

"Eugénie, you are perfectly absurd! I feel very sorry for you!"

"When one discovers the intrigues of these gentlemen, one is absurd. Will you say again that her lover is always

there when you go there? It is a pity that he himself said that you waited for him a long time. Idiot! not to see why you go to his house when he isn't there!"

"Oh! how patient a man must be, to listen to such nonsense!"

"I am sure that you go every day to see your old neighbor, this Marguerite. I do not know her, but I detest her, I have a perfect horror of her. Her Monsieur Ernest had better not think of bringing her here, for I will turn her out of doors,—*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* after being married only fifteen months, to have a mistress!"

She hid her face in her hands and began to sob again. Her tears made me forgive her injustice. I was about to go to her and to try to make her listen to reason, when she suddenly sprang to her feet, saying:

"Very well, monsieur, if you have a mistress, I warn you that I will have a lover."

I confess that those words produced an exceedingly disagreeable effect on me; I was well aware that they were said in anger; but I would never have believed that Eugénie could conceive such a thought.

"Madame," I said, in a tone in which there was no trace of gentleness, "do not drive me beyond bounds, or wear out my patience. I am willing to tell you once more that I have no mistress, that Madame Ernest never was and never will be my mistress, that I very rarely go to see them, and that it is a mere chance that Ernest is not there when I go. Indeed, as he is not a government clerk, it is impossible to be sure when he will be absent. But now, madame, remember this: even if I had one or several mistresses, if I neglected or totally abandoned my family, that would give you no right at all to have a lover, A man's position and his wife's are entirely different. I may have love-affairs, waste my fortune, ruin my health;

that will not dishonor you, madame, and will not bring strange children into the bosom of your family. It is not the same with the conduct of a wife; a single misstep ruins her in the eyes of society, and may compel her husband's children to share their bread with her seducer's children."

"That is all very convenient, monsieur; it proves that you can do what you please and that wives have simply to pass their lives weeping. Is that fair, monsieur?"

"If you consider that too hard, too cruel, why do you women marry? You should know what you undertake when you take that step."

"You are right, it would be much better not to marry—to do like Mademoiselle Marguerite; then one is free to follow one's inclinations, to drop people and take them up again at pleasure."

I made no reply. I paced the floor back and forth. Meanwhile Eugénie had ceased to weep and had wiped her eyes; a moment later she came to me and laid her hand gently on my arm:

"Henri, perhaps I was a little wrong. But if this woman never has been, and is not now your mistress, if you do not love her—swear to me that you do not love her."

"Yes, I swear to you that I do not love her, and that I have never been her lover."

"Well then, my dear, to prove that, you must promise me that you will never in your life put your foot inside their door again."

"No, I am very sorry, but I will not promise that."

"Why not, if you do not love the woman?"

"It is just because I have no relations with Madame Ernest that I propose to continue to see her and her husband just when it suits me. Besides, listen, my dear

love: to-day you are jealous of her and don't want me to go there any more; in a few days you will be jealous of someone else, and you will forbid me to go somewhere else. Things cannot go on so. I love you, I love you as dearly as on the day we married; but I don't propose to be your slave. There is nothing more ridiculous than a man who does not dare to take a step without his wife's permission; there is nothing more impertinent for a woman than to say to her husband: 'You shall not go here or there, because I do not want you to.'"

"But, Henri, I don't forbid you to go, I simply beg you not to."

"No, my dear Eugénie; I am distressed to refuse, but I shall go where I please."

"And you dare to say that you do not love that woman?"

"If I loved her you would never have known that I went there, you would never have heard of her."

"So you prefer the friendship of those people to my repose and happiness? You sacrifice my peace of mind to them?"

"Your peace of mind should not be disturbed by my visits to Ernest. I say again, I will not give way to absurd suspicions, and I will do as I please."

"Very good, monsieur; I appreciate your love at its real value now."

And madame returned to her room; I sat down at the table and ate my dinner. Eugénie did not return; I dined alone. It was the first time since our marriage; alas, I would never have believed that it could happen.

My dinner was soon at an end; nothing takes away the appetite like a dispute. And to dispute with a person whom one loves makes one angry and grieved at the same time.

I went out immediately after dinner. I walked aimlessly, but I walked on and on; nothing is so good as the fresh air to calm ill humor. But it was cold; and I finally went into the Variétés. That is a theatre where there is usually something to laugh at, and it is so pleasant to laugh!

I took a seat in the orchestra. I spied Bélan there, no longer becurled and in a tight-fitting coat, as he always used to be before his marriage, but clad in a full-skirted frock coat, buttoned to the chin, and with a solemn face which in no wise resembled that of a man who was in search of conquests.

Was that the effect of marriage? Could it be that I myself had undergone the same metamorphosis?

I was glad to meet Bélan; I hoped that the meeting would divert my thoughts from my own troubles. I took a seat beside him. The ex-lady-killer was so absorbed in his own reflections that he did not recognize me.

"Well, Bélan, are you enjoying the play?"

"Hallo! it's my old friend Blémont! What a lucky meeting! Since we have been married, we hardly see each other at all. Ah! we had lots of fun together in the old days, when we were bachelors! those were the good old times!"

"What! do you repent already of being married?"

"No, certainly not; I only said that in jest. Oh! I am very happy; but what I mean is that a married man owes it to himself not to run wild like a bachelor. However, I am exceedingly happy."

"I congratulate you. How does it happen that madame is not with you?"

"Oh! she is dining out with her mother, at a house where they couldn't invite me, because I would have made thirteen at the table. I am going to call for her.

But as it is a house where they dine very late, Armide told me not to hurry, not to come until between ten and eleven. That is why I came here to pass the time. But how is it with you, my dear Blémont? I thought that you never left your adored wife; everybody speaks of you as a pair of turtledoves."

"Oh! turtledoves don't always agree. We have had a little quarrel and I came to the theatre for distraction."

"The deuce! really? you have had a quarrel? Well, that's like me. I often have quarrels with Armide, but that doesn't prevent me from being happy. They are little clouds which soon pass away."

"And does your mother-in-law still weep all the time?"

"Oh! don't speak of my mother-in-law! I admit that she is my nightmare; it is she who stirs up her daughter. I know well enough that she doesn't do it from any bad motive; she is too noble for that. But when one doesn't come up to the mark in a salutation or in any sort of ceremony, when one does not offer his hand quickly enough, why there is no end to the reproaches and complaints. However, I am very happy; although those devilish Girauds have already tried to make people think that I am a cuckold."

"What! the Girauds have said——"

"That I am a cuckold. Yes, my friend, they have said that! Whereas, she is a woman of the most rigid principle; and moreover, a woman with whom a man can be perfectly at ease. One of those cold, marble women, you know. When you kiss them, it is exactly as if you didn't kiss them; it produces the same effect."

"The deuce! that is very comforting!"

"Oh, I promise you that when I am a cuckold, I shall make no objection to its being advertised. But I know

why the Girauds say that: it's from spite because they weren't at my wedding."

"I agree with you. But still, I cannot believe that they have ventured to say——"

"Yes, they have. But let me tell you what pretext they have invented for making such remarks. I told you that, before obtaining Armide's hand, I thrust aside a lot of rivals, among others a marquis who had six decorations."

"Yes."

"Well, instead of taking offence, like the others, because I triumphed over him, the marquis came to me and complimented me frankly, and said with charming affability: 'You have beaten me, and it is quite right; you are a better man than I; I appreciate you and do you justice. Marry Mademoiselle de Beausire, and allow me to continue to be your friend.'—What do you say to that, eh?"

"That was very obliging."

"As you can imagine, I was touched by that proceeding. I urged the marquis to come to see us, and he did so; in fact, he comes very often. That is the basis for the slanders of the Girauds. When my wife heard of that, being very strict in such matters, she insisted at once that I should ask the marquis to cease his visits; but I showed my strength of character; I said to the marquis: 'you come every day, try to come twice a day, and I shall be better pleased than ever.' He does it. And in this respect, at least, my mother-in-law considers that I did well."

I made no reply, but I laughed to myself. What selfish creatures we are! we laugh at the misfortunes of others and we desire to be pitied for our own misfortunes. At a quarter-past ten, although there was another play to

be performed, Bélan went away to call for his wife. He was afraid that if he stayed any longer, he should be late and be scolded by his mother-in-law, which however did not prevent him, when he bade me good-night, from saying again that he was very happy.

XII

APPEARANCES

For several days Eugénie and I hardly spoke; she remained in her bedroom almost all day, and I in my study. In that way we did not dispute, to be sure; but that mode of life was very dismal; it was not for the purpose of living on such terms with my wife that I married her; and I felt that I should certainly regret my bachelor days if it was to continue.

I went more than once to Ernest's. Ah! what a difference! how happy they were! they were still lovers. Love, pleasure, happiness—those are what they gave to each other; and they were still as light of heart, as much like children, as when they lived under the eaves. Ernest, as a matter of courtesy, asked me about my wife; but I fancied that he was not anxious to see her again; for my part, I dared not urge him to come, although I was careful not to mention my quarrel with Eugénie.

When two people are young, especially when they are fond of each other, they cannot remain on bad terms long. Eugénie and I hovered about each other, but our accursed pride and self-esteem continued to keep us apart. It was a contest between us to see which should give way first;

because, doubtless, she did not think she was in the wrong, and I was perfectly sure that I was in the right. But one day, when Eugénie was seated beside me, saying nothing, I threw self-esteem to the winds; I embraced my wife affectionately, and we were reconciled. Ah! such reconciliations are very sweet. However, as they are always the result of quarrels, I consider that they are a pleasure in which one should indulge in moderation. The time for us to move drew near, and I felt that I should regret to leave that house in which I had passed such happy hours. But I kept my regrets to myself, for my wife would have ascribed them to other reasons. For Eugénie, that change was an unalloyed joy. I pretended to share it. I think that her satisfaction was twofold: in the first place, because she was leaving that house; in the second place, because she was moving from that neighborhood, where she knew that we were near the home of Ernest and his wife.

On the eve of the day when we were to move, as everything in our apartment was topsy-turvy, we preferred not to dine there; we could not invite ourselves to dine with Madame Dumeillan, who had not been well for some time; to go to my mother's might cause her to lose her evening game of whist; so we made up our minds to dine at a restaurant, in a private room. My wife looked forward to it with delight. As my business would detain me quite late in the Tuileries quarter, I arranged to meet Eugénie on the Terrasse des Feuillants; she was to go to our new apartment, and then to meet me at the place appointed, at five o'clock.

I finished my business as quickly as I could, for I did not wish that Eugénie should be at the rendezvous before me, and have to wait for me. I made such haste that it was not half-past four when I reached the Garden

of the Tuileries. No matter, I thought, I will stroll about.

Less than three minutes after I had arrived, I heard a voice which was not unfamiliar to me, say:

"It seems that we are fated always to meet here; it is very strange, really."

It was Lucile again. I had not seen her since my wedding day. She was dressed very elegantly, and she was alone.

"Is it you, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur, I am obliged to come to the garden to meet you."

"It is true that in Paris, when people are not looking for each other——"

"And even if they are looking for each other, that is no reason why they should find each other. Have you just been married again, monsieur?"

"No, madame. That is well enough when one is a bachelor—to take a new wife every week."

"You have reformed now, I suppose?"

"Yes, madame, entirely."

"I congratulate you. And yet, although you have reformed, you look very much to me as if you were here to keep an appointment."

"That is true, madame, but appointments do not always mean love-affairs."

"I don't know what they mean; but you are waiting for someone, and I'll bet that it's a woman."

"You are not mistaken; moreover, a woman whom I am going to take to dinner in a private room at a restaurant."

"You have reformed with a vengeance! But I should have been more surprised to find it the other way. It was well worth while to get married!"

"Madame, I will not prolong your error; it is my wife for whom I am waiting, and whom I agreed to meet here."

"Your wife! I beg pardon, monsieur, pray receive my apology. I had no suspicion that you had become a Philemon. Come, joking aside, is it really your wife that you are waiting for?"

"Yes, to be sure. What is there so extraordinary in that?"

"Do you mean that you are still in love with your wife?"

"Still! why it seems to me that I was married only yesterday!"

"Bless my soul! how touching!"

Lucile bit her lips with a sneering smile. I had no wish to prolong my conversation with her, although I was certain that my wife would not come so early. I made a motion to bid her adieu; she grasped my arm.

"What, you are going to leave me so soon? Mon Dieu! don't tremble so; your wife will not come yet."

"I trust not; for, frankly, I would not like to have her see me talking with you."

"Would she whip you?"

"No, she wouldn't do anything; but she is jealous, and it would make her unhappy."

"She would be very foolish to be jealous of me."

"That is true; but jealous people often are foolish, you know."

"Henri, I am going to make a proposition to you."

"What is it?"

"Take me to dinner instead of your wife. You can tell her this evening that you had an engagement that you couldn't break."

"No, I haven't reached that point yet, thank heaven!"

"Oh! I was only joking, monsieur; I know that you are too virtuous to play such a trick. Have you got ants on your legs?"

"No, but I don't want to stand here."

"Very well; let us walk then."

"I don't want to walk with you."

"But what if I don't choose to leave you?"

"I beg you, Lucile, let me go."

"Dear me! monsieur assumes his sentimental air. Look you, the garden is free to all; if I choose to walk beside you, you have no right to prevent me. Besides, I am very curious to see your wife. Will she eat me if she finds me with you? Ah! monsieur refuses to answer any more questions; monsieur is angry."

"Yes, madame, I confess that I don't understand what motive induces you to act as you are acting. It is pure malice, and it seems to me that I have given you no reason to treat me so."

"Indeed! it seems so to you, does it? You have a very short memory. It seems to me that I have many reasons for revenging myself on you."

"Madame, you must have other people to think about who interest you much more than I do; and in the four years since we ceased to see each other, I am surprised that you remember me at all."

"It is certain that you hardly deserve it. But what would you have? Perhaps that is the reason."

"Lucile, some other day we will talk as long as you wish; but to-day, I beg you, leave me; don't stay with me."

"Ha! ha! you make me laugh!"

I began to walk very fast; Lucile did the same, continuing to talk to me, although I did not reply. I saw that people were staring at us, because I had the aspect of

running away from a woman who was pursuing me. I was in dismay. At last I stopped.

"This is a horrible thing that you are doing, Lucile."

"Well, calm yourself, I will leave you, for you make my heart ache. You start convulsively every time you see a woman! But tell me first, have you my portrait still?"

"Your portrait? Why, I don't know, I will look."

"I want you to give it back to me. You can't care anything about it, and I want it, for it was very like me."

"I will give it to you."

"I still live on the same street, but two houses beyond."

"Very well; I will bring it to you."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"Ah! that will be very kind of you. Adieu, my dear Henri. Come, don't be angry any more and don't forget what you have just promised."

"No, I——"

The words died out on my lips, for I caught sight of my wife within two yards of us, pale and trembling, and gazing directly at us. And at that moment, Lucile had offered me her hand as she bade me good-bye, and I, overjoyed because she was about to leave me, was shaking hands with her in the friendliest way! Eugénie had seen all that, and Lucile, noticing the sudden change in my features, turned, glanced at my wife, smiled a mocking smile, and walked away, bidding me adieu again in a most unceremonious fashion. Ah! I did not know what I would do to her!

I walked toward my wife. My manner was certainly as embarrassed as if I were guilty.

"So here you are. I was talking with a lady whom I had just met."

"Yes, I saw that lady, and I heard her too. What is the use, monsieur, of making an appointment with me, of bringing me here to witness such things?"

"Well, upon my word! Now you are going to discover something wrong in this; but I swear——"

"Oh! it costs you nothing to swear! Who is that woman? Is it your former neighbor, Madame Ernest?"

"Oh! no indeed! It's a woman whom I—whom I knew before I was married."

"Ah! one of your former mistresses, I suppose."

"Well! what if that were the fact? As I have not seen her for a long time——"

"You have ceased to see her, and yet she has the assurance to talk with you so freely, holding your hand and looking into the whites of your eyes! And she laughed in my face when she went away. Ah! she has a most impudent manner! But I shall know her again. I had plenty of time to look at her, for you didn't see me, you were so engrossed with that woman! You promised her something, for she said to you: 'Don't forget what you have just promised me.'—Is that so, monsieur?"

"Great heaven! it is very possible, madame. I have no very clear idea what she said to me, for I wanted but one thing, and that was to get rid of her; for I suspected that if you saw me talking with her, it would put a lot of crazy ideas into your head."

"Crazy ideas! you expect me to see you with a woman like that, and not to object to it! Ah! I am suffocating! I cannot stand any more!"

She put her handkerchief to her eyes. I took her hand and led her away, for I had no desire to make a spectacle of myself again on the Terrasse des Feuillants. We walked along the Champs-Élysées for some time, without

speaking. I stopped in front of a restaurant and started to go in.

"What is this place?"

"A restaurant, where we are to dine."

"It is no use, I am not hungry; I want to go home."

"You know very well that everything in our apartment is packed up, and that we can't dine there. Really, Eugénie, you are making yourself miserable for no reason at all. How can you think that if I had relations with that woman, I would be with her where I knew that you were coming?"

"What did you promise her?"

"Mon Dieu! I have no idea; she had been boring me and annoying me for ten minutes; I would have promised her all the treasures of the Indies to get rid of her."

"But why did she hold your hand?"

"Because it is the habit of all those women; they can't say a word to you without taking your arm or your hand."

"Is she a prostitute then?"

"No, she is a—a kept woman."

"She has a very insolent manner, at all events."

At last I induced Eugénie to go in, and we were shown to a private room. I wrote my order, for after all, I myself realized that I had not dined. The waiter left the room, whispering to me in an undertone:

"Monsieur will ring when he wants the dinner served."

He evidently misunderstood the state of affairs. Husbands and wives are not in the habit of dining in private rooms.

Madame took a seat in the corner, a long way from the table. She rested her head on one of her hands. She had ceased to weep, but she did not look at me. How amusing it would be, if she acted like that all the time

that we were dining, or that I was dining! So this was the little spree to which I had looked forward so eagerly! Man proposes and woman disposes.

I wished Lucile at the devil with all my heart. It was her malice, her obstinacy, that had caused all the trouble. The idea of her refusing to leave me! It was simply because it annoyed me.

It seemed to me that if we were to maintain that attitude, I should do well to ring for dinner at once.

Our room looked on the Champs-Élysées. The weather was beautiful; although it was only the middle of April, it was as warm as midsummer. I opened the window and looked out at the passers-by for some time. Eugénie did not budge; I walked to her side.

"Eugénie, do you propose to stay a mile away from the table like this?"

"I told you that I was not hungry. Eat your dinner, monsieur, I don't object."

"What a delightful pleasure party!"

"Yes, I shall remember it."

"And so shall I, madame. You must have a very bad temper to refuse to listen to reason! The idea of thinking that I was looking for that woman when I was waiting for you!"

"I don't say that you were looking for her, monsieur, I am not foolish enough for that; but I do think that she was looking for you, a task which you often save her, no doubt. Besides, you have admitted that she used to be your mistress."

"That I knew her before I was married, that is true, madame. Perhaps I was foolish to admit that; but as I had done no wrong, I did not think that I ought to lie."

"When a man has known a woman, and continues to see her, he must be on as good terms with her as ever."

"You are very much mistaken! If it were so, men would have altogether too much on their hands."

"Everybody has not known all Paris as you have!"

"Madame, I have been no better nor worse than other men; but I see that I should have been less honest with you."

"You ought to have been more honest with me before marrying me."

"How nice it would have been to tell a virtuous young lady about all my adventures as a bachelor! Really, you are too absurd."

I seized the bell cord and jerked it violently, for I felt that my irritation was getting the upper hand of me.

The waiter came; he opened the door a crack and put the end of his nose inside, saying:

"What does monsieur wish?"

"Our dinner."

"Instantly, monsieur."

And he went away after casting a furtive glance at Eugénie.

"Madame, you need not eat, if you prefer not; but you should sit at the table at least, in order not to attract the waiter's attention."

Eugénie made no reply, but she took her seat at the table opposite me.

The soup was brought, and I filled madame's plate.

"Why, monsieur, I told you that I should not eat anything."

"But, madame, I do not bid you to eat anything; I simply put some soup in your plate so that you may seem to have dined."

Madame made no reply, but she did not touch her soup. I ate mine, humming between my teeth. That is my way when I am angry.

The waiter appeared again; he always took the precaution to turn the knob three or four times before coming in. The fellow was an idiot; he must have seen that we were not thinking of making love.

He brought us a beefsteak. At home, Eugénie always served; I did not like to serve, or to carve. But *mamade* would not so much as look at me. I cut a piece for myself with an angry gesture, then pushed the platter before Eugénie. But she would not touch it; she knew that it annoyed me to see that she did not eat, and so she was very careful not to take a mouthful.

I found that vexation and impatience were taking away my appetite too; but no matter! I ate a double quantity. To add to my annoyance, a little violinist had stopped under our window; he had played the same tune ever since we had been there, although I had shouted to him that I would give him nothing. I was not in a mood to be generous.

Well, upon my word! Once more the knob was turned and returned. What a blockhead that waiter was! I should have been delighted to kick him. He entered, still with an air of mystery, and placed some sweetbreads on the table.

Really these family quarrels are most tiresome, for there is no way to avoid them, one must submit to them from beginning to end. If you are bored at other people's houses, you can go away and never go there again; but at home it is different: you always have to go back. I know that there are husbands who go out in the morning and do not return until bedtime; but is it not a hundred times better to be a bachelor than to be obliged to shun one's house in order to lead a quiet life? Then at all events, one has some little enjoyment; one laughs now and then at home.

I had evidently been indulging in these reflections, and many others which were not at all rose-colored, for a long time. The violin played on, but I had ceased to attend to it; I had also forgotten the sweetbreads which were before us; indeed I did not realize that I was at a restaurant. I was recalled to myself by the noise of the knob being turned. The waiter entered with a roast chicken. He placed his chicken on the table, and looked at the previous dish, which had not been touched. He was uncertain whether he should carry it away, and he looked from one to the other of us. I am sure that he seldom saw such a taciturn couple. As no one said anything to him, he decided to speak.

"Monsieur and madame have not touched the sweetbreads yet. I brought the chicken too soon; I will take it away again."

"No, no, leave it and take away your sweetbreads; we don't want them."

"Oh! I assure you, monsieur, that they are nicely cooked, and so fresh——"

"I tell you to take them away."

I do not know whether the tone in which I said this was terrifying, but the waiter took the sweetbreads and disappeared like a flash, closing all the doors behind him. The chicken was before us. I wondered if madame would not be obliging enough to carve it. I placed it in front of her and begged her to be good enough to do so. She pushed it back to the middle of the table and said:

"I will not carve."

I took up the platter again and handed it to her, saying:

"Madame, you know very well that I am not in the habit of carving."

"You may do as you choose, monsieur."

"Do you refuse to carve it, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Will you do it—once, twice?"

"No, monsieur."

"In that case, as it is foolish to make the landlord a present of it——"

I took up the dish and threw the chicken out of the window. My wife involuntarily gave a little shriek. I walked to the window, for I noticed that the violin had stopped. I saw that the little Savoyard had just picked up the chicken, and fearing doubtless that someone would come out to get it, he hastily threw his violin over his shoulder, concealed the bird under his jacket, and ran across the Champs-Élysées as if the devil were at his heels.

At that sight I was unable to keep a sober face; I burst into a roar of laughter, which increased in volume when I saw that the little violinist ran faster than ever on seeing me at the window. Madame was unable to resist the desire to see what had become of the chicken. She saw the little fellow's performance, and bit her lips to avoid laughing; but when I turned toward her, she could hold out no longer; she followed my example.

Nothing restores concord so quickly as laughter; disputes rarely take place between laughter-loving people. We had drawn near to each other, having both left the table to go to the window. I do not know how it happened, but I soon found Eugénie in my arms; then we kissed, we walked away from the window, and——

Once more the door was opened, this time without rattling the knob. That waiter was fated to do everything awkwardly; he never guessed right! Eugénie, red as a cherry, hastily moved away from me, but not so quickly that the waiter, who had seen us close together, did not instantly disappear with the macaroni, muttering:

"Beg pardon! you are not ready. Besides, I don't think the cheese is cooked enough."

He closed the door. I ran after Eugénie, who murmured:

"Mon Dieu! what will that waiter think?"

I confess that that question worried me very little, and in a few minutes I think that Eugénie forgot it too.

I had to ring to get the macaroni. The waiter came at last; but he hummed and talked to himself upon the landing before touching the knob; then he fumbled over it for five minutes. All the time that he was in the room, my wife kept her eyes down and dared not move or speak. She was not used to such occasions.

I ordered the dessert and the champagne. We ended our dinner much more gaily than the beginning of it would have led one to think. I swore to Eugénie twenty times over that I had ceased to see Lucile long before I had married her. She recovered her amiability; she took nothing but biscuit and champagne, but she declared that it was very pleasant to dine in a private room, and I promised her that we would do it again.

The day following that festivity was our moving day. Eugénie and her maid went early to install themselves in our new apartment, where she wished to have the furniture arranged at the outset according to her own taste. I remained at our old apartment to look after the packing and loading; indeed, I was not sorry to remain as long as possible in my former bachelor's quarters.

The people who were hired to move us had promised that everything should be done at four o'clock; at seven I was still there. Finally, the last load drove away, and I was at liberty to do likewise. I walked once more through those bare rooms, which to me were so rich in memories. It was there that I had entertained so

many pretty faces. It was there too that I had brought Eugénie as a bride, and that she had made me a father. What a pity to leave a home where we had been so happy! Should I be as happy elsewhere? But it was time to have done with such childish thoughts. One is certain to be happy anywhere with the object of one's affections; my wife was probably impatient at my non-arrival, so I started.

I reached our new home on Boulevard Montmartre, and the maid admitted me. The last furniture had been brought, but nothing was in place; whereas I expected to find the apartment all arranged and all in order.

What on earth had they been doing ever since morning! I asked the maid, who seemed distressed.

"Dear me, monsieur," she replied, "I did not know where to put all these things."

"What! hasn't my wife been here with you all day?"

"Yes, monsieur, madame has been here. At first she worked hard arranging things; but after a little, as she was moving a piece of furniture——"

"She hurt herself?"

"Oh! no, monsieur; madame did not hurt herself; but she found something, I don't know what, that made her unhappy; she cried, and then she went to her room, and she hasn't touched anything since."

The deuce! so there was something new! I wondered if I ever again should enjoy two days of peace! But only the day before we had been reconciled; and that very morning she had shown no signs of discontent. What on earth could have caused this new outbreak? Asking myself these questions, I went to Eugénie's bedroom. I found her sitting in a chair, but her eyes were dry, and she seemed to be reflecting profoundly. On my arrival, she did not stir.

"What are you doing here, my dear love? It is impossible to find one's way about here, and the maid says that you will not give any orders; what does it mean?"

"It means, monsieur, that you may arrange everything to suit yourself; for my part I will not lift a finger."

"Monsieur! Well, well, so something else has gone wrong. Upon my word, this happens too often. Tell me, what is the matter to-day?"

"Oh! I ought not to be surprised; I ought to be prepared for everything with you. But there are things which I shall never be able to take coolly; and when a woman finds that she is deceived so shamefully——"

"Deceived! come, come! explain yourself, madame, I beg you. What fable has somebody been telling you to-day?"

"No one has been telling me any fables, monsieur. This time I have proofs, undeniable proofs. Do not think that I was looking for them; they fell into my hands by the merest chance. When I was trying to put your desk in place, something broke, the drawer opened and I saw—here, monsieur, this is what I found."

Eugénie opened a drawer and threw upon a table in front of me the eight portraits of women, which I had kept in my desk.

I confess that at sight of them I was speechless for a few moments; but I recovered myself at last.

"Why should the discovery of these portraits offend you? You know very well that I amuse myself by painting a little. When I was a bachelor, I made these miniatures. They are fancy faces, and I saw no harm in keeping them."

"Ah! they are fancy portraits, are they?" cried Eugénie; and she trembled with anger, and her eyes gleamed. "Monster that you are! I expected that reply."

You forget that I saw one of the models yesterday! Look, monsieur, is this a fancy portrait? Oh! the likeness is too good for anyone to mistake it; it is a portrait of that woman who was with you yesterday."

She held out the portrait of Lucile. I had forgotten that it was among those which I had kept; and as it happened, it was one of the best likenesses. I did not know what to say; I was so vexed to appear like a culprit when I had done no wrong, above all, I was so irritated by my wife's reproaches that I threw myself on a chair and said nothing more.

Eugénie pursued me, with Lucile's portrait in her hand.

"You are confounded, monsieur! you cannot think of any more lies to tell; it's a pity, you tell them so well! So this is the woman with whom you have had nothing to do for a long time, whom you don't see now, and whom you never loved! But you have her portrait, you treasure it carefully, with those of seven other women whom you probably meet *by accident*, as you met that creature yesterday! Eight mistresses at once! I congratulate you, monsieur; you make a most virtuous and orderly husband! And this is the man who swore when he married me that he would never love any woman but me! that I alone would suffice to make him happy! Very well, monsieur, have eight mistresses, have thirty, if you choose, but I will not continue to live with a man who acts so. I no longer love you; I feel that I hate you, that I cannot endure the sight of you. I am going home to my mother. Then, monsieur, you will be free to receive your neighbors and all the women whose portraits you paint."

"Faith, madame, you will do as you choose. For my part, I confess that I am beginning to be tired of your jealous disposition and of your outbreaks, your scenes.

This is not the life that I looked forward to when I married. It has ceased to be that pleasant, happy life which was ours at first; and yet, I love you as dearly as ever; I have not ceased for one instant to love you. It is not my fault if you manufacture chimeras, if you detect intrigues in the most innocent things. I have nothing to reproach myself for. If I were guilty, it is probable that I should have taken precautions, and should have found a way to conceal my guilt; but I did nothing wrong in keeping portraits which were painted before I knew you, and which recalled my bachelor studies. It is true that one of them is a portrait of the woman that I met yesterday. In fact, that was what she asked me for, and what I had just promised to send her, when you appeared."

"Not to send her, but to carry to her yourself. I remember perfectly now. Oh! you can't make me believe, monsieur, that that portrait was painted long ago. It is that woman just as I saw her yesterday, while she was shaking hands with you so lovingly. And the idea of your daring to claim to be innocent, when I discover every day fresh proofs of your faithlessness! But you shall not carry her her portrait,—neither hers, nor any other. Look! this is what I do with them! Ah! I wish that I could break the bonds that bind me to you in the same way!"

Eugénie threw the miniatures on the floor; she jumped upon them and ground them to pieces under her feet; I had never seen her in such a frenzy of rage. I said nothing; I kept my seat, and my placidity seemed to intensify her wrath. At last, when she had reduced the ivories to powder, she raised the sleeve of her dress, snatched the bracelet from her arm, in which my portrait was set, and then threw it upon the floor and trampled upon it, crying:

“I will not keep the portrait of a man whom I can no longer love!”

The sight of the destruction of the women's portraits had caused me no emotion; but when I saw Eugénie trample my image under her feet, my image which she had sworn to keep as long as she lived, I felt a sharp pang. A keen, poignant grief suddenly took possession of me. It seemed to me that my happiness had been destroyed like that portrait. I involuntarily started to stop Eugénie; but a feeling of just pride held me back, and I allowed her to consummate the sacrifice.

After shattering my portrait, Eugénie dropped into a chair as if exhausted by the transport of passion to which she had yielded. I fancied even that I could detect in her eyes some feeling of shame for what she had done. Thereupon I rose and gazed sadly at the shattered fragments of my portrait; then, glancing at my wife, I left the room without saying a word to her. I left the house. I have no idea where I went. I had not dined, but it was my turn not to be hungry. I could still see Eugénie trampling upon my portrait, and it seemed to me that she could no longer love me, that her love and her fidelity were attached to that image for which she no longer cared.

I realized that I must be a man rather than a lover, for love does not last forever, but manliness sustains us throughout our whole life. While reasoning thus with myself, I sighed profoundly, for I still adored Eugénie; after all, jealousy is a proof of love, they say: my wife would come to herself and I would forgive her. But the breaking of my portrait, my work, which should have reminded her of the delicious sittings, when she was beside me—Ah! that was very wicked! and I should have difficulty in forgiving her for that.

I walked a long while; at last I found myself in my old street; I believe that our legs have an instinct of their own, and that they lead us toward the places which they have often traversed.

Suppose I should go to see Ernest and his wife, I thought, to divert my mind from my troubles? They were my only friends, and would gladly share my sorrows. However, I would not tell them of my woes, but I would forget them in their company. So I betook myself to Rue du Temple.

The concierge told me that they were at home. I went up. Madame Ernest admitted me and ushered me into her room, saying:

"By what miracle have you come in the evening, monsieur? It is seldom enough that we see you even in the morning. Ernest is at the theatre, but he promised to return early."

The little woman gave me a seat and then resumed her work. We talked, or rather she talked; she talked of Ernest, of his work, of his success, of their mode of life. I enjoyed listening to her. While she was speaking, I looked at her, and it seemed like one of the evenings which I used to pass in her attic room. Marguerite was still the same, and in my thoughts I loved to call her by that name still.

Suddenly she stopped and said to me:

"I am doing all the talking. I must be wearying you, am I not?"

"Oh, no!"

"But you don't say anything."

"I am listening to you."

"Never mind, you are not usually silent like this. Are you unhappy?"

"Perhaps so."

"A little falling out with your wife? I will wager that I have guessed it!"

"That is true; we have had a little dispute."

"And that makes you unhappy. Ah! you are like me; when I have a dispute with Ernest, it makes me very sad! Luckily it seldom happens, and it doesn't last long. I should die if it did!"

And the little woman told me about some petty discussions between Ernest and herself, the merest child's play, which could not interrupt the current of their love for an instant. I had been listening to my little neighbor for an hour, without being bored for an instant; however, I was anxious to know what was going on at home, so I rose.

"I won't try to detain you," said Madame Ernest; "your wife is waiting for you, no doubt, and you mustn't let her get impatient. Ernest will be sorry to have missed you."

I took leave of my former neighbor and left the house. As I stepped into the street, a woman who was leaning against a post near the porte cochère, seized my arm convulsively, and said:

"You have been alone with her for an hour and a half; her Ernest wasn't there. I know, for the concierge told me so."

It was Eugénie. Eugénie, who had followed me, no doubt, and had seen me go into that house, and had remained at the door all the time that I had been with Marguerite.

I was so surprised, so thunderstruck, that I could not answer. After saying these few words, my wife left me and ran swiftly before me. I called her, I tried to overtake her, and succeeded at last. But she would not answer me, she persisted in refusing to take my arm.

And thus we returned home. I tried to have an explanation with my wife, but she locked herself into her bedroom and refused to admit me. A bed was made for me in my study.

So I was obliged to pass the night alone, and separate like that after the scenes of the evening! Ah! that was a very gloomy housewarming in our new apartment.

XIII

EUGÉNIE AND MARGUERITE

After passing several weeks without speaking to each other, my wife and I came together again and became reconciled; but it seemed to me that the reconciliation was not very sincere, that it was simply a sort of smoothing over. Had these frequent scenes diminished our love? No, I still loved my wife; but when often repeated, disputes sour the temper and change the disposition. The words that people say to each other in passion, although forgotten afterward, deal a fatal blow to our illusions, and they never grow again.

We went again to Livry, to our daughter's nurse, on a superb day in June. How little that excursion resembled the other! we had no dispute, but the tranquillity which reigned between us was like that which ordinarily follows twenty years of married life; and we returned home without driving our horse to the edge of a ditch.

A very sad event marked the first months of our life in our new home: Eugénie lost her mother. Dear Madame Dumeillan was taken from us after a short illness, when

we had every reason to hope that we might long enjoy her presence and her affection. I felt the loss almost as keenly as my wife, for Madame Dumeillan was our best friend. Careful not to take part in our disputes, pretending not to notice them, Madame Dumeillan, without blaming either of us, had the art of bringing us together again, and of reviving the most affectionate sentiments in our hearts. Whenever Eugénie had been to see her mother, I knew it at once, because she was more amiable with me. Ah! how seldom do we see parents who long for our happiness without trying to govern our conduct, our actions; and without fatiguing us with their advice! The loss we had sustained was irreparable; one does not meet twice in one's life people who love us for ourselves alone and who do not impose a thousand obligations on us as the price of their affection.

Eugénie's sorrow was very deep and very keen. To divert her, I took her into society. We went to evening parties, to the theatre, to concerts; we received company at our house more frequently. The commotion of society does not altogether enable one to forget one's loss, but it gives one employment and distraction. There are sorrows with which one loves to withdraw into oneself; there are others which compel us to shun ourselves, and in which reflection is deadly.

We brought our daughter home. Her presence helped to divert my wife's thoughts from her grief. The sight of her Henriette, her caresses, her first words, unintelligible to anybody but ourselves, enabled Eugénie at last to endure the loss she had sustained. A woman is a daughter before she is a mother, but she is a mother much longer than she has been a daughter; and in our hearts affection does not look backward, it inclines rather toward the later generation.

Madame Dumeillan's death made my wife richer than I by four thousand francs a year. I did not envy her her wealth, but I regretted that my children should owe more to their mother than to me. That thought led me to work much harder; I passed a large part of my time in my study and at the Palais. We saw each other less frequently; was that the reason that we agreed better? I hoped that that circumstance was not accountable for it. I was always glad to return to Eugénie and I was very happy when I held my daughter in my arms. My little Henriette was so pretty! she seemed already very bright and intelligent to me, and I was disposed to spoil her, to do whatever she wished; but my wife was more strict than I.

We saw my mother, but only very seldom; she considered that we played whist badly at our house. The Girauds came sometimes to see us; they were still busily engaged in negotiating marriages. I gave myself the pleasure of having them, with Bélan and his wife, at my house. There was a rattling discharge of epigrams on the part of Giraud. The superb Armide did not seem to notice them, and as for Bélan, he entrenched himself behind his wife, whose servant he seemed to be, and to whom he never spoke without bowing.

In the large parties, the boisterous entertainments which we frequently attended, there were some pretty married women, and some exceedingly pretty unmarried ones. I will frankly confess that I sometimes surprised myself, oblivious of the fact that I was married, making eyes at the ladies and paying court to the young women; the latter did not respond to my glances; the fact that I was a married man prevented them from taking any notice of me; but it was not always the same with the others. Those periods of forgetfulness, however, lasted

only for an instant; then I was greatly surprised to find that I had been behaving like a bachelor. There is no great harm in casting a soft glance at another woman than one's wife; but if Eugénie had done as much, if she had cast such a glance at a man, I should have considered it very wrong. Surely I did not regret that I was married; why then did I behave sometimes in society as if I were not? But that apparent frivolity was due to my disposition and not to my heart. I do not consider that because a man is married he must necessarily behave like an owl, and never dare to laugh and jest except with his wife; in that case marriage would be too heavy a chain.

I went sometimes to see Ernest; he too, was a father, the father of a little boy. He and Marguerite were happy beyond words. Fortune smiled upon them; Ernest was earning money, and, if he had chosen, there were plenty of people who would gladly have come to his table to congratulate him upon his success and to flatter his wife, closing their eyes to what was lacking in their union. But Marguerite did not choose to go into society; she insisted that a few real friends are much to be preferred to parties where women tear one another to pieces and men deceive one another. She spoke of the world as if she were familiar with it.

"This society in which you wish me to mingle," she said to Ernest, "would think that it did me much honor by receiving me; indeed many women would blush to speak to me. 'She is not married,' they would say to one another as they eyed me contemptuously. And I, my dear, do not feel disposed to put up with such a greeting. In the bottom of my heart I feel quite as worthy of esteem as any of those ladies; for I would give my blood and my life for you; and there is more than one of them who would not do as much for her husband."

I considered that my old neighbor was right. Ernest himself had no answer to make; and yet he would have been glad to have her go sometimes into the world, in order to acquire the habits of society and to avoid awkwardness if she should ever receive company. He wished to make his little Marguerite a lady. It seemed to me that she was very well as she was.

For some time my wife had been less jealous; perhaps she felt that she had always been wrong to be jealous; perhaps she had striven to correct herself. But suppose that that were not the reason? Suppose that she cared less for me? *Mon Dieu!* how ingenious we are in inventing tortures for ourselves! I was unhappy because of my wife's jealousy; and lo and behold, I had begun to worry because she left me in peace!

Sometimes, however, I saw that her eyes followed me as of old when I was speaking to a pretty woman; but if, after playing the gallant, I approached Eugénie, as if to set her heart at rest, she would look away with an indifferent air, and pretend that she had not been noticing me. Was that her new way of loving me, and was there no mean between that frigid manner and the transports of jealousy?

Among the people who came to my house, there were many men of letters and artists. Their company was agreeable; they were at least witty in their malice, and unceremonious in their manners. A very pleasant painter, whom we had met at many functions, insisted, although a bachelor, upon giving a ball for the ladies at whose houses he often danced. Monsieur Leberger issued his invitations, and everybody accepted. We looked forward to having much sport and merriment at a party given by a bachelor painter. For my part, I was careful to obtain invitations for the Bélans and the Girauds; I love to

bring enemies face to face. Leberger invited everybody who was suggested to him, his most earnest wish being to have a large number of guests; indeed, the ballroom was to be his studio, and there would be plenty of room.

My wife made some objections to going to the ball; she thought that it would not be enjoyable, she declared that she no longer cared about dancing. No longer cared about dancing, and she was but twenty years old! I insisted that she should go, and she yielded at last. But we did not start until our little Henriette was asleep; I wished that she were old enough to go and dance with us.

Two torches at Leberger's door pointed out his abode when we were still far away. Our artist was determined that nothing should be lacking at his ball; the staircase was lighted by candelabra at frequent intervals; there were no flowers on the stairs, but there were rugs. The strains of the orchestra guided us, for the ball was already under way. An obliging neighbor, who lived on the same floor as the artist, had lent him his apartment, which served both as dressing room and laboratory; for the punch was concocted and the refreshments prepared in the neighbor's apartment.

The studio, transformed into a ballroom, presented a striking appearance. It was spacious, but well-lighted. Finished pictures, sketches and studies adorned the walls. Busts, statues, and torsos served as candelabra; the musicians were perched upon a broad flight of steps, above which ancient Roman costumes were draped. The orchestra was made up of amateurs; but those amateurs had the self-assurance and almost the talent of Tolbecque. Behind them stood a manikin, which held a serpent to its mouth, as if it were playing on it; and a small flute was placed in the mouth of an Ajax, and a trombone in the hand of Belisarius.

There was a great crowd; Leberger had invited a great many of his fellow-painters, and poets, musicians, and sculptors. The ball was already well in train. I saw Giraud dancing with his daughter, while his wife had accepted the invitation of her oldest son, who was beginning to administer some very graceful kicks to his neighbors. I saw Madame Bélan, who had deigned to accept the hand of a poet, while her husband remained with his mother-in-law, Madame de Beausire, who was seated in a corner of the studio, where she seemed to be posing as the *Mother of the Maccabees*.

My wife joined some ladies of her acquaintance, and I went to watch a quadrille. My eyes fell upon a young lady who was dancing very timidly but who was by no means without grace. I knew that face, yes, I certainly knew it; but where had I seen it? Was it possible? Yes, it was Marguerite, it was Madame Ernest. That dress, so different from the simple one in which I had always seen her, had prevented me from recognizing her. I was far from expecting to see her at that ball. By what chance had she come? Probably her husband had insisted. But then he must be there—yes, there he was, watching his wife dance and gazing at her with evident pleasure. He was right; she was one of the loveliest women in the room.

I could see nothing surprising in the fact that Ernest had brought his wife there; I could see no harm in his taking her everywhere with him; but there were, in that assemblage, absurd people who did not agree with me. Luckily a person's station is not written on his forehead.

But my wife! Since that evening when she had followed me, she was convinced that I either was or had been on intimate terms with Madame Firmin. I certainly should not tell her that my former neighbor was

there, but if she should see Ernest, she would undoubtedly find it out.

I was as disturbed as if I were guilty; if I had been, perhaps I should not have been so embarrassed. However, I could not avoid saying good-evening to Madame Firmin; I certainly would not be impolite because my wife was unjust; but I would try to do it without letting her see me.

I walked toward Ernest, who had seen me and was coming toward me.

"So you are here, my dear Blémont? I am delighted that you are; I didn't expect the pleasure of meeting you. So you know Leberger, do you?"

"Yes, he comes to my house sometimes."

"His ball is very fine. I brought my wife; look, she is over there dancing."

"I have seen her."

"Marguerite did not want to come; but I lost my temper, and at last she consented. In the first place, Leberger told me: 'It is just a small affair, without any formality.' Anyone would expect that, at a bachelor's quarters; and after all, my wife is quite as good as other women here. The instant that I call her my wife, no one should presume to call her anything else; and if we could know what all the people in this room have done, I fancy that we should learn some fine things."

"You know my ideas on that subject, my dear Ernest; I am not one of those who believe in virtue only after a visit to the notary's office. But no one here knows that you are not married, and it's not one of those things which there is any need of proclaiming."

"Of course not. Just look at Marguerite; see how lovely she is! I was frightened, because I thought she would be awkward before people; she makes a better

figure than I expected. I said to her before we came into the room: 'My dear love, just persuade yourself that you are better-looking than all the people whom you are to see here, and then their staring will not frighten you.'

"That is what a woman should always say to herself, even when she goes to court."

"Madame your wife is not here?"

"I beg pardon, she is."

"Oh! then I must go and bid her good-evening."

"I think that she is dancing now.—There are some very amusing faces here, are there not?"

"Oh, yes! there are some fine subjects for a farce."

I trusted that Ernest would forget to pay his respects to my wife; but how was I to prevent him? The quadrille came to an end. I took advantage of the moment when the ladies were being escorted to their seats, and I went to Madame Ernest, who luckily was far away from my wife.

My old neighbor seemed overjoyed to see me.

"Do sit down here with me a moment," she said; "I am so glad to find someone that I know! I am lost in the midst of all these people. And poor Ernest doesn't dare to leave me. I am afraid that it is boring him.—Do you think that my hair looks well?"

"Very well, madame."

"It seems to me that it looks unbecoming. I much prefer myself in the little cap that I always wear at home. But Ernest insisted upon bringing me, so of course I had to make a toilet."

"I beg pardon, madame, I should be very pleased to stay with you; but, you see, my wife is with me——"

"Madame Blémont is here! dear me! and I am keeping you. Oh! do show me your Eugénie; I should like so much to see her."

“At this moment there are too many people between us. But Ernest knows her, he will show her to you. Excuse me, but I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again.”

I left Madame Ernest; she probably considered me far from courteous. *Mon Dieu!* how horrible it is to have a suspicious wife; a man does not know what to do nor how to behave in society.

At that moment Bélan clutched my arm and said:

“Good-evening, my friend; you know that I am not a cuckold.”

“Bless my soul! did I ever say that you were, my dear Bélan?”

“My friend, I have my reasons for telling you this. Those blackguardly Girauds have made most shameful remarks. My mother-in-law wanted me to fight them.”

“Fight Giraud and his wife?”

“I mean the husband, of course; I was anxious to do it myself; but my wife Armide insisted that it wasn’t worth while.—But those people are here; and when I see them I cannot contain myself.”

“*Mon Dieu!* do you mean to say that you believe everything that is told you? Perhaps the Girauds have never mentioned you.”

“Oh! yes, they have; they have even—Excuse me, my mother-in-law is beckoning to me.”

Bélan left me. I was still laughing at what he had said when I saw Ernest talking with my wife. Well! there was no way of preventing that. After all, I was very foolish to torment myself when I had no reason for self-reproach.

Ernest walked away from Eugénie, and I went to her. From her manner toward me, I saw that she knew that Madame Firmin was there.

"I did not want to come to this ball," said Eugénie; "it was clearly a presentiment. I should have followed my inclination, and then I should not have come into contact with people whom I don't want to see. You have been talking with your former neighbor, monsieur, of course?"

"My neighbor? Oh! I beg your pardon—you mean Madame Firmin."

"I know that she is here,—her *monsieur* was good enough to tell me so just now."

"It is true that Madame Firmin is here and that I have been to say good-evening to her."

"How pleasant it is for me to be at a party with that woman!"

"I give you my word that, if I had known that she was to be here to-night, I would not have urged you to come."

"Oh! I believe you! but you need not let that embarrass you, monsieur. Ah! that is she, no doubt, just passing with her Monsieur Ernest. What an ordinary face! anyone could see what she is. But pray go, monsieur; perhaps she wants to speak to you. She is staring at me, I believe, the impertinent creature! I beg you, monsieur, at least to forbid her to look at me in that way."

I was on the rack; Ernest and Marguerite had passed very close to us, and I trembled lest they had heard Eugénie. I walked away and took a seat at an *écarté* table, where I remained for more than an hour.

When I returned to the ballroom, I passed Madame Ernest. She looked at me and smiled; evidently she had not overheard my wife; I walked toward her, for I had made up my mind, and I was no longer disturbed about what people might think.

"Do you not dance, Monsieur Blémont?"

"Not often."

"I have seen your wife; she is very pretty, but she has rather a serious expression. Is she always like that?"

"No, she has a headache."

"Aren't you going to dance with her?"

"She does not lack partners."

"I don't care if she doesn't; I have been invited to dance a great deal; but I insisted on dancing with Ernest too. I haven't missed a quadrille yet."

"Are you enjoying yourself here?"

"Pretty well. But I prefer to be at home in our chimney corner."

A partner came up and claimed Madame Ernest's hand. I sauntered about the ballroom. My wife was dancing with a very good-looking little dandy. Bélan was standing opposite his wife, at whom he gazed with admiration, while tall Armide seemed vexed to have her husband for her vis-à-vis. Giraud joined me and said in a sly tone:

"It seems to me that Bélan has shrunk since he was married; his wife crushes him."

"You are unkind, Giraud."

"Just look at the mother-in-law yonder. Either she has been weeping, is weeping, or is about to weep."

"Perhaps it is with pleasure."

"Oh, yes, she has a very merry expression! How Bélan must enjoy himself with those two women! It hasn't brought him good luck, not inviting us to his wedding. By the way, the marquis is not with them. How does that happen?"

"What marquis?"

"Ha! ha! you pretend not to know, do you? It is everybody's secret. —But I believe that my daughter wants something to eat."

Marguerite was right: the world is very unkind!—The quadrille came to an end. I was standing near my wife, although I was not speaking to her. Bélan stopped beside us, and, while passing the guests in review, pointed to Marguerite, saying:

“There’s one of the prettiest women in the room!”

“You have wretched taste, monsieur,” cried Eugénie. “How can anyone call that woman pretty? And what a style too! anyone can see what she is.”

“What? What is she, pray? Do you know her?” Bélan instantly made haste to ask.

“No, I don’t know her; but I know what she is, and——”

“Madame,” I interposed, “why do you feel called upon to speak ill of a person who has never injured you?”

“Never injured me? oh! you are pleased to say that, monsieur; but I may at least feel offended that Monsieur Leberger invites his friends’ mistresses to a ball that he gives for us.”

“The deuce! what do you say? That little woman——”

“Is Monsieur Firmin’s mistress.”

“I was told that she was his wife.”

“And she is his wife,” I said, with an angry glance at Eugénie. But she continued in an ironical tone:

“No, Monsieur Bélan, that little woman, whom you are kind enough to call pretty, is not Monsieur Firmin’s wife; and monsieur knows that better than anyone, although he tells you the contrary.”

“What? Do you mean that——”

I did not listen to what Bélan said; I turned my back upon Eugénie. I did not believe that she was spiteful, but what she had just done disgusted me. At that moment I believe that I detested her.

The dancing continued, but many people had gone. I walked about the studio. It seemed to me that I heard several people whispering to one another, and at the same time pointing at Madame Ernest. Bélan was quite capable of having gone about to tell all his acquaintances what my wife had told him. Poor Marguerite! she was pretty, so they were overjoyed to calumniate her. They would have been more indulgent if she had been ugly.

There was to be but one more quadrille. The orchestra gave the signal. Madame Ernest had a partner, who led her to a place opposite my wife. I saw that Eugénie instantly led her partner away and took her place elsewhere. Thereupon Madame Ernest's partner led her to a place opposite Madame Bélan. Tall Armide did as my wife had done; she turned on her heel and returned to her seat, crying in quite a loud tone:

"I prefer not to dance."

I was indignant. I hastily took the hand of the first lady I saw, without even taking time to invite her; I led her away and we took our places directly opposite Madame Ernest and her partner. Thereupon my wife did as Madame Bélan had done; she left the quadrille, darting glances at me to which I paid very little heed. While we were dancing, Ernest approached me. His face was red and his eyes gleaming.

"My friend," he said to me in an undertone, "I thank you for what you have just done; I shall not forget it."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! you must have seen the ostentation with which those people refused to stand opposite my wife. Indeed, I overheard some words from that little man's tall wife, and I had difficulty in restraining myself."

"You are mistaken, Ernest."

"Oh, no! she is afraid of compromising herself by standing opposite a woman who is not married! what a pitiful thing! If I chose to investigate the conduct of many of these married ladies, I fancy that I should make some very fine discoveries."

Ernest talked quite loud and glanced ironically about. I was afraid that someone would hear him; I dreaded a scene. Luckily the quadrille came to an end. Little Marguerite had also noticed that several ladies smiled meaningly as they looked at her. She was not at her ease. She said to Ernest immediately after the dance:

"We are going now, aren't we, my dear? It is late, and I am tired."

"No, we will not go yet," replied Ernest sharply; "I should be very sorry to go now; we will stay until the last."

His wife was not in the habit of replying, and besides, she saw plainly that there was something wrong. Firmin took my arm and led me away. We walked around the studio. I tried to divert his thoughts from the subject which engrossed them, but Giraud came toward us, rubbing his hands.

"There is plenty of gossip here," he said to me; "those Bélans are evil-tongued, I tell you."

"My dear Giraud, I care little about gossip, and——"

"Do you see that young woman in blue over there, with blue flowers in her hair?"

Giraud was pointing to Madame Ernest. I did not reply, and I tried to drag Firmin away in another direction; but he dropped my arm and walked up to Giraud, saying:

"What have you heard about that lady? I am very fond of gossip myself."

"They say that she isn't married; that she's the mistress of a young author who is here, and who introduces her everywhere as his wife."

In vain I looked at Giraud and made signs to him; he was not looking at me, and he continued to speak to Firmin:

"People don't like it because Leberger invited her to his ball, and they say that she doesn't amount to much; that she has been an embroiderer, or a lacemaker; someone even declared that she used to be in the ballet at one of the boulevard theatres."

"Monsieur," said Firmin, seizing Giraud's arm and squeezing it hard, "pray go to all those people who have made such remarks, and tell them from me that they are blackguards; that, although that young woman is not married, she is none the less worthy of esteem; that she is a thousand times more respectable than many lawful wives; and should I say to the ladies here, in the words of the Scriptures: 'Let her who is without sin among you cast the first stone,' I fancy, monsieur, that even your wife herself would not dare to stone my poor Marguerite."

Giraud was sorely embarrassed; he realized what a fool he had made of himself, and he confounded himself in apologies. But Ernest absolutely insisted that he should point out the people who had made the remarks, and the business agent hastened to designate Bélan. Thereupon Ernest started toward the little man; I tried in vain to hold him back; he would not listen to me. I followed him, to try to adjust the affair. Bélan was in the act of handing a glass of orgeat to his wife. Ernest brushed roughly against him, and jostled him so that the glass and its contents fell upon the superb Armide's dress. She uttered an exclamation; her mother uttered two. Bélan turned to Ernest and murmured:

"What the deuce! be careful what you are doing!"

Ernest simply smiled and said:

"That was very unlucky!"

Tall Armide saw the smile, and said to her husband:

"That man did it on purpose; he doesn't even condescend to deny it."

And the mother-in-law added:

"I trust, Monsieur de Bélan, that this is not the end of this business, and that my daughter's dress will not be ruined with impunity. This gentleman must apologize, —he must!"

Bélan had become much less belligerent since he was married; however, he left his wife and walked up to Ernest, who had halted a few steps away.

"Monsieur, you have spoiled my wife's dress, and I am surprised that you do not at least apologize, like a man of breeding."

"Monsieur, you and your wife have tried to destroy my wife's reputation; a dress may be washed, but slanderous words are not to be effaced for a long while; so that it is for you, monsieur, to apologize to me."

Bélan was speechless. I made haste to intervene between them.

"My dear Ernest," I said, "Bélan is guilty of thoughtlessness only; he has simply repeated what he overheard."

"Certainly; I only repeated what Madame Blémont told me," said Bélan. "I invented nothing. Notwithstanding that, monsieur, if you demand satisfaction——"

"No, no, Bélan; Ernest sees plainly that I am the only one with whom he has to deal, and you will offend me seriously by interfering in matters which concern myself alone."

Bélan walked away to join his ladies. I do not know what he said to them, but he soon left the ball with them.

As they went out, his mother-in-law cast a withering glance at Ernest.

I had remained by his side; he was lost in thought and said nothing to me. I first broke the silence.

"Ernest, my wife is the cause of all your disagreeable experiences this evening. I cannot explain the motives which have led her to act thus. I do not need to tell you that I disapprove of her conduct; but that probably will not suffice, and I am ready to give you satisfaction."

"No, my dear Blémont; we are not going to fight just because your wife has made some unkind remarks; I do not need to have you explain her motives, for I understand them perfectly."

"You understand them?"

"I can guess them, at all events. Your wife is jealous of Marguerite."

"Who can have told you that?"

"Look you, my dear fellow; a man does not get to be an author without studying the human heart a little, and especially the female heart."

"It is only too true; my wife is horribly jealous of all the women whom I knew before my marriage. But for that, do you suppose that I would not have invited you and your wife to come to see us?"

"I have guessed all that. I am sorry for you, my friend, but I bear you no ill will."

"I am going to invite your wife for the next contradance."

"No, for it will make your wife unhappy."

"She has not hesitated to make me unhappy; and I choose to prove that I have no share in her spiteful remarks."

I invited Madame Ernest for the quadrille; she accepted, saying with a laugh:

"I am very glad that you have asked me, monsieur; I thought that you did not consider that I danced well enough for you."

"I am going to dance opposite you," said Ernest; "then I shall be sure that you will have a vis-à-vis."

The violins struck up. I took my partner's hand. There were only enough people left to form one set. All our acquaintances had gone.

I looked about for my wife. She was ghastly pale, and that made me wretched; I felt all my anger fade away. I was almost sorry that I was dancing; but she should not have driven me to the wall.

Suddenly Eugénie rose and came toward me. What was she going to do?

"Monsieur, I do not feel well, and I want to go."

"We will go after the quadrille, madame."

"No, monsieur, I want to go at once."

Marguerite overheard my wife, and instantly said:

"Monsieur Blémont, if madame your wife is not well, go, I beg you; do not mind me."

"No, madame; I shall have the pleasure of dancing with you; then we will go."

"What, monsieur," said Eugénie satirically; "you do not come when madame gives you leave?"

"Madame, that is enough; not a word more, I beg you."

"Very good! that is all, monsieur. I will leave you. Dance with this woman; make her your mistress again as she used to be when she lived under the eaves, in the attics of your house! I am going home."

And she did go. But Madame Ernest had heard all; Eugénie had spoken loud enough to be sure of being overheard. Marguerite had turned red and pale by turns. She hung her head, and I thought that I could see tears

glistening in her eyes. But she quickly recovered herself, wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, and tried to resume a smiling expression as she looked at her husband.

I was thunderstruck and enraged at the same time. I did not know where I was; and in the midst of all that perturbation of spirit, I had to dance!

"Well, it is your turn," called Ernest. "Forward! what are you thinking about?"

Luckily he had heard nothing. I took advantage of a moment when we were not dancing, to say to my partner in an undertone:

"Madame, you heard what my wife said, I see. I do not ask you to forgive her; she is unpardonable, jealousy has disturbed her reason; but be good enough to believe that I am more hurt than you by what she has said."

"I confess, Monsieur Blémont, that I was so surprised, so shocked!—To call me your mistress! Great heaven! who could have said that I had been your mistress?"

"I trust that you do not think it was anything that I have ever said to her, madame?"

"Oh, no indeed, monsieur! But who can have told her that?"

"Nobody told her, madame. I tell you again, that jealousy alone can inspire such calumny."

"My attic! she thought to make me blush by reminding me that I once lived in an attic. Oh! I don't blush for it; there is often more virtue, more refinement in an attic than in a boudoir! But do you mean to say that your wife is jealous of me?"

"Yes, madame, ever since I was unfortunate enough to tell her of the evenings which I used to pass with you and Ernest. If you knew how unhappy her jealousy makes me! Alas! the happy days of our married life passed very quickly!"

"Oh! I am very sorry for you, Monsieur Blémont. I pity your wife too, and I forgive her, for Ernest did not hear what she said. But I beg you, never let him know what your wife said!"

"Most certainly, I shall not be the one to tell him!"

"Oh dear! I wish I had not come to this ball. I should have done much better to stay at home."

That fatal dance ended at last. Everybody went away. Ernest and his wife bade me good-night. I read in Marguerite's eyes how glad she was to go.

My wife had gone. Who could have escorted her? Could she have gone home alone? One thing was certain, that she was no longer there.

Leberger came to me and said:

"Are you looking for your wife? She felt rather indisposed while you were dancing, and Dulac took her home. You know Dulac?—a tall fellow,—one of our amateur orchestra."

"I do not know the gentleman, but I will thank him when I see him."

"He is a good fellow, who plays the violin very well. I will bring him to one of your receptions if you wish."

"Do so. Good-night; it is late."

"It was rather a pleasant affair, and people enjoyed themselves; don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes! I enjoyed myself amazingly."

I returned home. I expected a scene; it is always an advantage to be prepared. If only my wife might be in bed and asleep! But no, I heard her walking back and forth in the salon. Aha! I met the maid carrying a mattress. Madame was having a bed made for herself in her boudoir. What a bore not to find peace and quiet at home! to have more scenes and quarrels! And we had been married only three years and a half!

Well, I knew that I must face the storm, and I entered the salon. Madame was in a most dishevelled condition; she almost frightened me. She was holding a phial of salts to her nose.

I was kind enough to go to her and ask her if she were ill. She did not answer. I was on the point of taking a light and leaving the room, when madame sprang to her feet and planted herself in front of me.

"So you have left that woman at last, have you, monsieur?"

"I don't know what you mean by *that woman*, madame. I danced with a lady whom I esteem, and who has been generous enough to forgive you for the shameful remarks that you made before her."

"She has been generous enough to forgive me! really, that is most noble of her! But I, monsieur, I do not forgive that lady, whom you *esteem*, for having the assurance to dance with you in my presence. That her clown of a husband should not object is quite worthy of him; but you, monsieur, have you no shame?"

"Yes, madame, I was ashamed this evening, and I was ashamed because I was the husband of a woman who behaved as you did!"

"What an abominable thing! You dare reprove me?"

"Yes, you, who slander in public a respectable woman."

"Say a prostitute, monsieur."

"You who publicly exhibit your absurd jealousy!"

"In truth, I am absurd to be jealous of you, you are not worth the trouble!"

"But do not expect, madame, that I will put up with such conduct! that you can insult my friends and that I shall keep quiet!"

"You ought to have made a scene before your mistress; that would have pleased her."

"You did not hesitate to humiliate me before the world; for it is humiliating for a man to be put in the position in which I was put at that ball."

"I shall go nowhere else with you, monsieur; then you cannot say that I shame you or humiliate you."

"You will do well, madame. It is much better not to go with your husband than to behave as you did this evening."

"From the tone in which you speak to me, monsieur, I see who the people are whom you have just left! You are profiting by their advice!"

Those words put the finishing touch to my exasperation. I rushed from the salon and locked myself into the bedroom.

XIV

MONSIEUR DULAC

Frequent disputes and rare reconciliations—so that was to be our life thenceforth. After Leberger's ball, we passed a whole month without speaking to each other. That month seemed very long to me; I sighed for my bachelor days, but even more for the early months of our married life.

We spoke at last, but not with the same effusion of sentiment as before. On the slightest pretext my wife became excited and lost her temper. When I argued with her, she had hysterical attacks and shrieked at the top of her voice. When we were first married, if we had a little discussion, she wept, but she never shrieked and she was never hysterical.

My daughter was three years old and she had grown to be a lovely creature; her features were as beautiful as her mother's, but she never sulked; she had already begun to talk and to argue with me. I was passionately fond of my little Henriette; when I was at odds with her mother, I would take my daughter in my arms, cover her with kisses, and make up to myself with her for the caresses which I no longer bestowed upon Eugénie.

"You will always love me, won't you?" I would say to Henriette; and when her sweet voice answered: "Yes, papa, always," my heart experienced a thrill of well-being which often made me forget my quarrels with my wife.

When winter brought back the time of balls and parties, Leberger brought Monsieur Dulac to our house; he was a tall, dark young fellow, very good-looking, and with a somewhat conceited manner; but it is not safe to trust to the manners that a person displays in society: to know people well one must see them in private. However, Monsieur Dulac was well-bred and very agreeable; he was said to be an excellent musician; and he had an independent fortune; those recommendations were quite sufficient to cause him to be popular in society.

Monsieur Dulac seemed to enjoy coming to our house. He was a constant attendant at our receptions, and sometimes he came to see me in the morning. He had a trifling difference about a farm which he owned in common with a cousin of his; he requested me to adjust the affair, which I readily undertook to do. The young man manifested much regard for me, and although I knew that one should not rely upon society friends, I have always allowed myself to be taken in by manifestations of friendship for myself, for I have never pretended to like people whom I did not like.

Thanks to Monsieur Dulac, we had music at our house more frequently. My wife had almost abandoned her piano; I need not say that she had ceased to give me lessons, for one must be on the best of terms with a person to have patience enough to teach him to play on any instrument. We were not always on good terms, and Eugénie was not patient; she had declared that I did not listen, and I had made the same complaint with respect to her painting; so that brush and piano were alike neglected.

But Monsieur Dulac, who played the violin very well, urged my wife to take up music again; I myself was very glad that Eugénie should not forget an accomplishment in which she was proficient. She consented, because a stranger's compliments are much more flattering than a husband's; the piano resounded anew under her fingers, and I listened with pleasure; she used to play so often when I was paying court to her!

With the taste for music, Eugénie also contracted a taste for balls, receptions, the theatre—in a word, for the world. We began to see a great many people; almost every day we had invitations to dinners or other festivities; and then we were bound to return the courtesies we had received; so that we had not a day to ourselves. That was not the placid existence which we had planned in the early days of our married life. For my own part, I confess that that constant rush made me dizzy; but it pleased my wife and it was one way of obtaining peace.

I earned enough money to meet the expenses of the life we led. Eugénie now spent on her dress a large part of her income. She had become very coquettish of late; however, she was not yet twenty-five, and she was as pretty as ever.

What distressed me was that amid all this dissipation my wife paid little attention to her daughter; our Henriette never lacked anything and she was well taken care of, but it seemed to me that her mother did not pet her enough. Eugénie loved her daughter dearly; I could not doubt that; perhaps it was because I spoiled her a little that she was more stern with her. I dared not reprove her; indeed at that moment I carefully avoided everything that could excite her; once more she was expecting to become a mother and I had received the news with the most intense delight; I felt that I should be so happy to have a son! To be sure I could not love him any more dearly than I loved my daughter, but I should love him as much, and from the delight that one child afforded me, I felt that with two my happiness would be twice as great. So I was most assiduous in my attentions to my wife; but I did not see that she was any more amiable to me.

I went very seldom to see Ernest, but I knew that they were happy. They had two children now, whom they adored, and Marguerite liked better to remain by their cradles than to go to balls or parties. I confessed to myself that I would have been glad if Eugénie had had such quiet tastes. Marguerite always was kind enough to inquire for my wife; as for Ernest, he had never entered our house again, and I approved his course.

I had not met Bélan for a long while, when he entered my study one morning, flushed, panting, and in a profuse perspiration. He sat down beside me and did not give me time to question him.

"I am, my friend, I certainly am! I am sure of it now. It is a most frightful, most abominable thing!"

"What is it that you are, then?" I asked, watching Bélan mop his forehead.

"Parbleu! do you need to ask? I am a cuckold!"

Bélan said this in such an absurd tone that I could not resist the desire to laugh. While I indulged it, Bélan sprang to his feet and muttered in a feeling tone:

"I did not think that an old friend, a married man, would laugh like this at my misfortune."

"I beg pardon, my dear Bélan," I said, forcing him to resume his seat; "I beg pardon. You certainly cannot suppose that I intended to hurt you. But the fact is that you said that so suddenly that I thought it was a joke."

"No, I swear to you that there is no joke about it. Mon Dieu! that wicked Armide! Such a well-bred woman, and nobly born! A woman who wouldn't let me take off my shirt in her presence! I cannot stand it any longer, and I have come to consult you as to what I had best do. You are a lawyer and you will advise me.—Shameless creature!"

"Come, come! First of all, calm yourself, Bélan, and then, if you desire my advice, tell me what makes you think that your wife is deceiving you."

"I have told you, my friend, of a certain marquis who used to pay court to my wife, and who afterward came in the kindest way to visit us. Oh! as to that, I must admit that he overwhelmed me with attentions. He came often——"

"It was you yourself who urged him to, so you told me."

"Yes, that is true, because the Girauds had presumed to make remarks. Besides, could I ever have imagined? Perfidious Armide!—A woman who pinched and bit and scratched me on our wedding night, when I—you understand?"

"Well, my dear Bélan?"

“ Well, the marquis finally almost lived at our house. He escorted my wife to the theatre, brought her home from parties and sang duets with her; he has a very fine voice, I admit. All that was agreeable to me, it was all right. Moreover, I said to myself: ‘ My mother-in-law is with them.’ But, the day before yesterday, having returned home when I was not expected, I thought I would go to my wife’s room; she was locked into her boudoir with the marquis. What for? There is no piano in her boudoir. My friend, I remembered my bachelor adventures, all the husbands I have wronged; it was as if someone had struck me with a hammer. I ran to the boudoir and knocked like a deaf man; my wife admitted me and made a scene. The marquis seemed offended by my air of suspicion, and I concluded that I was mistaken. But it seems that when those infernal ideas once get into your head, they don’t leave it again very soon. I dreamed all night of Molière’s *George Dandin*, and *Le Cocu Imaginaire*. Ah! my dear Blémont, jealousy is a terrible thing! You know nothing about it and you are very lucky! And to think that it struck me like a pistol shot! ”

“ My wife has taught me all the suffering that jealousy can cause, my dear Bélan, but go on.”

“ Well, yesterday I was to dine out, and my wife was to dine with one of her aunts. I left the house. On the way I remembered my adventure with Madame Montdidier—you remember, before we were married? ”

“ Yes, I remember.”

“ She also had said that she was going to dine with one of her aunts, and I was the aunt. Ah! my friend, I believe that it brings bad luck to have injured others so much. In short, it occurred to me to go home and watch my wife. I hurried back and went into a passageway opposite our door. That also reminded me of my bachelor

days. After five minutes I saw Armide come out and get into a cab in a very alluring *négligé*. My mother-in-law was not with her, although she had told me that they were going together. I followed the cab, at the risk of breaking a blood-vessel. It took my wife to the new boulevards, which were in the opposite direction from her aunt's house. It stopped before a restaurant celebrated for its fried fish and gudgeons. Armide went in; a few seconds later I did the same; I put five francs in the waiter's hand and ordered him to tell me with whom that lady was dining. He drew the portrait so accurately of the gentleman who was waiting for her that I could not help recognizing the marquis. He pointed out to me the room where they were, at the end of the corridor, and I ran there like a madman. I found the key on the outside, I rushed in like a lunatic, and I found myself in the presence of an artilleryman, who was toying with a *grisette* from the twelfth *arrondissement*.

"The artilleryman was enraged at being disturbed; I could not find excuses enough; he blackguarded me, and while the damsel was readjusting her neckerchief, he rushed at me, seized me by the shoulder and pushed me out of the room, saying that he would see me again after dessert. You will understand that I had no desire to wait for the artilleryman. Finding myself in the corridor, where there were no other keys on the outside, I began to shout in a stentorian voice: 'Armide, open the door!' No one opened the door, and the waiter informed me that, during my controversy with the soldier, the lady had hastily left with her escort. But where had she gone? That was what no one could tell me. I returned home; I found no one there but my mother-in-law, who called me a visionary; and that night, at the first words that I said to my wife, she locked herself into her room and refused

to admit me. That is my situation, my friend; I dreamed again of George Dandin, and I hurried here this morning to tell you about it."

Bélan ceased to speak. I was still tempted to laugh, but I restrained myself.

"In all this that you have told me," I said to him, "there are presumptions, but no proofs."

"Ah! for us fellows, my dear Blémont, who have had so many adventures, who know all about such things, they are quite as good as proofs."

"The waiter may have been mistaken; perhaps it wasn't the marquis; you didn't see him, did you?"

"No, for they had gone, and I had no desire to wait for the artilleryman."

"You did not act shrewdly."

"That is true, I was a perfect donkey; I lost my head."

"You must distrust appearances, my poor Bélan; I am better able than anybody to tell you that."

"The deuce! do you mean that you have had suspicions about madame?"

"I? Oh no! never! but she had suspicions about me, and very ill-founded ones too, I promise you."

"The deuce! suppose I was wrong! What do you advise me to do?"

"Wait, keep your eyes open, and watch, but with prudence; or else frankly ask your wife to explain her conduct yesterday; perhaps it was all very simple and innocent."

"In fact, that is quite possible. The one thing that is certain is that I acted like a child. Dear Blémont, you calm my passions. After all, just because a young man comes often to one's house, and is attentive to one's wife, that doesn't prove—for you yourself are not jealous of Monsieur Dulac, who is always at your house, and who

often acts as escort to your wife. My mother-in-law was talking about it only the other day to my wife."

"Indeed! those ladies were talking about me, eh?"

"No, they were simply talking about Monsieur Dulac. Armide thinks that he is a very handsome man, but for my part, I see nothing extraordinary about him. Then they cited you as an example; they said: 'There's a husband who is not jealous; look at him! Monsieur Dulac is his wife's regular escort, and he doesn't seem to notice it; he is a husband who knows how to live.' And then they laughed, because, you know, when the women begin to pass us in review, there's no end to it.—Well, well! What are you thinking about, my dear fellow? You are not listening to me."

"I beg your pardon; I was thinking that the world notices things, which we, who are most interested in them, often do not notice at all."

"You advise me to wait, to watch, and to be prudent; I will do it. If I should acquire proofs—Oh! then I shall explode, I shall be terrible, inflexible. Adieu, my dear fellow, I will leave you, for I see that you are pre-occupied. Au revoir."

Bélan took his leave, and I bade him adieu with no desire to laugh. It was strange what an effect had been produced upon me by what he had told me of the comments of his wife and her mother. They noticed that Monsieur Dulac was an assiduous guest at my house and very attentive to my wife; and I myself had not noticed it. That was because I saw no harm in it, whereas the world is so evil-minded! And calumny is such a delicious weapon. Figaro was quite right: "Calumny, always calumny!"

Although I knew that it was mere malicious gossip, I involuntarily passed in review Monsieur Dulac's conduct.

I recalled his earnest desire to be received at my house after the ball from which he had escorted my wife home.

I became sad and pensive; I was conscious of a discomfort, a feeling of disquietude which I had never known before. I wondered if that was the way in which jealousy made itself felt. But what nonsense! What was I thinking about? It was that Bélan, who had upset me with his own conjugal misfortunes. That his wife deceived him was possible, yes, probable; she had never loved him; but my Eugénie, who used to love me so much, and who loved me still, I hoped—although jealousy had soured her disposition to some extent! But that very jealousy was a proof of love. And she had ceased to be jealous. Why? Ah! Bélan need not have reported those remarks to me! He did it from malice.

To banish such thoughts, I left my study. I heard the piano; my wife was in the salon, and the sight of her would cause me to forget all the nonsense that had been passing through my mind. I entered abruptly. Monsieur Dulac was there, seated near my wife,—in fact, very near, as it seemed to me. At that moment, I admit that his presence caused me a very unpleasant sensation.

Dulac rose hastily and came toward me.

“Good-afternoon, Monsieur Blémont. I have brought madame a lovely fantasia on a favorite air of Rossini’s. Madame plays it at sight with such assurance and such taste!”

“Oh! you always flatter me, Monsieur Dulac.”

“No, madame; on my honor, you are a remarkable musician.”

I walked about the salon several times; then I asked Eugénie:

“Why is not Henriette here?”

"Because she is playing in my room, I presume. Do you suppose, monsieur, that I can always attend to her? A girl who will soon be four years old can play alone."

I sat down to listen to the music, but in five minutes my wife said that she was tired and left the piano. Monsieur Dulac talked a few minutes, then took his leave. My wife returned to her room, and I to my study, saying to myself that I must have seemed like a donkey to that man.

When I was alone I blushed at the suspicions that had passed through my head. In spite of that I became more constant in my attendance on my wife. I did not leave to others the duty of escorting her to parties; I went with her myself. But, as the time of her delivery drew near, Eugénie went about less. Balls were abandoned, receptions less frequented, and even music was somewhat neglected. At last the moment arrived, and I became the father of a boy.

Nothing can describe my joy, my intoxication; I had a boy! I myself ran about to announce it everywhere; and among my visits I did not forget Ernest and his wife, for I knew that they would share my delight. They embraced me and congratulated me; they adored their children, so that they understood my feeling.

My mother was my son's godmother, with a distant kinsman of my wife. I gave him the name of Eugène and we put him out to nurse at Livry with the same peasant woman who had taken our daughter, and whose trade it was always to have a supply of milk.

Eugénie seemed pleased to have a son, although her joy was less expansive than mine. Our acquaintances came to see us; Monsieur Dulac was not one of the last. That young man seemed to share my pleasure so heartily that I was touched. I had totally forgotten the ideas

that had passed through my mind a few months before; I could not understand how I had been able to doubt my Eugénie's fidelity for an instant.

Bélan also came to see me. He was satisfied now concerning his Armide's virtue. She had demonstrated to him that she had arranged to meet the marquis on the new boulevards to go begging for the benefit of the poor; and her reason for doing it secretly was that her modesty would have suffered too much if people had known of all that she did for the relief of her fellow-creatures. Bélan had humbled himself before his charitable better half; he went about everywhere extolling his wife's noble deeds; he was no longer afraid of being betrayed. So much the better for him. I congratulated him and bowed him out just when he seemed to be on the point of mentioning Monsieur Dulac again. I gave him to understand that I did not like evil tongues and that I should take it very ill of anybody who tried to disturb the peace of my household.

No, I certainly would not be jealous again. I blushed to think that I had been for a single instant. If Eugénie was no longer the same with me as in the first months of our wedded life, it was doubtless because we are not permitted to enjoy such happiness forever. Enjoyment, if it does not entirely extinguish love, certainly diminishes its piquancy; when one can gratify one's desires as soon as they are formed, one does not form so many. And yet Ernest and Marguerite were still like lovers! To be sure, they were not married. Could it be that the idea that they could leave each other at any minute was the consideration that kept their love from growing old?

When she had entirely recovered her health, Eugénie's taste for society revived; she paid little attention to her

daughter, and that distressed me. For our Henriette was fascinating. I passed hours talking with her, and those hours passed much more rapidly than those which I was obliged to spend at evening parties.

I suggested going to see my son at Livry. My wife declared that he was too small, that we must wait until his features had become more formed. But I did not choose to wait any longer; I longed to embrace my little Eugène, so I hired a horse one morning, and went to the nurse's house.

My son seemed to me a fascinating little fellow; I recognized his mother's features in his. I embraced him, but I sighed; something was lacking to my happiness. I felt that it was wrong of Eugénie not to have desired to embrace her son.

The nurse asked me if my wife was sick. The good people thought that she must be sick because she had failed to accompany me.

"Yes, she is not feeling very well," I said to the nurse.

"Oh well! as soon as she's all right again, I'm sure that madame will want to come too."

"Yes, we will come together the next time."

I passed several hours beside my son's cradle. As I drove back to Paris, I indulged in reflections which were not cheerful. In vain did I try to excuse Eugénie, I felt that her conduct was not what it should be, and it distressed me to feel that she was in the wrong.

I reached home at six o'clock. Madame was not there; she had gone to dine with Madame Dorcelles. She was one of her school friends whom she had met again in society; one of those dissipated, coquettish women, who consider it perfectly natural to see their husbands only by chance, when they dine with him. I did not like that woman, and I had told Eugénie so and had requested her

not to see too much of her; and she went to dine at her house!

She had not taken her daughter. My little Henriette ran out to embrace me, with outstretched arms! How could Eugénie take any pleasure, away from her daughter? I could not understand it.

"Didn't your mamma take you?" I asked the child, taking her on my knee.

"No, papa."

"Did you cry when she went away?"

"Yes, papa, I cried."

"Poor child! you cried, and your mother left you behind!"

"But mamma told me that if I was very good she would bring me a cake; so then I stopped crying."

"Did anybody come to see your mamma to-day?"

"Yes, you know, that gentleman who plays music with mamma, and who gives me sweeties."

"Monsieur Dulac?"

"Yes."

"And did you stay with your mamma while she was playing music?"

"No, because mamma said that I was making too much noise; she sent me to play in the hall with my doll."

I felt a weight at my heart; and for a long time I was silent. Evidently my little Henriette divined that I was unhappy, for she looked timidly at me and said nothing. I kissed her lovingly, and then she smiled again.

Where could Eugénie be? That Madame Dorcelles did not receive that evening; at least, I thought that it was not her day. At all events, I did not choose to go to her house; I suspected that woman of giving Eugénie very bad advice, and I might let my ill humor appear. It was much better not to go there.

But why should I always hold myself in check? Why should I not tell my wife frankly what my feelings were? In order to have peace, to avoid quarrels. But in order to have peace, should a man let his wife make a fool of herself and do rash things, if nothing worse? No, I determined to tell Eugénie all that I had on my mind.

Perhaps those ladies had gone to the play. I went out, after kissing Henriette again and handing her over to her nurse. Where should I go? At what theatre should I look for them? I went into the Variétés, the Gymnase, and the Porte-Saint-Martin. And I remembered that I had met Eugénie there on the day following Giraud's ball, at which I saw her for the first time. My eyes turned toward the box in which she sat that evening. Ah! how glad I would have been to go back to that time! How madly in love I was! I still loved her as dearly! but she——

The time passes quickly when one is engrossed by souvenirs of the past. The play came to an end unnoticed by me. I was aroused from my reflections by seeing that everybody had gone; whereupon I understood that I must do likewise. I returned home. As I approached the house, I saw a gentleman and lady standing at the door, and I thought that I recognized my wife. I stepped behind one of the trees on the boulevard, where I could see them better. Yes, it was my wife and Monsieur Dulac. He had brought her home. But they talked together a very long time! He took her hand and did not release it. Why did he hold her hand like that? When a man holds a woman's hand so long, it means that he is making love to her. I remembered very clearly that that was what I used to do; and that I used to bestow a loving pressure upon the hand that I held in mine. He was pressing my wife's hand, no doubt, and she did not

withdraw it! That idea maddened me, I could no longer restrain myself, and I walked rapidly toward them. They dropped each other's hands; Dulac bowed ceremoniously, then exclaimed:

"Ah! here is Monsieur Blémont! I have brought madame home; she deigned to accept my arm. Good-night, madame; pray receive my respects."

He bowed and walked away; I do not know whether I made any answer to him. I pushed my wife into the house and we went upstairs without exchanging a word. When we reached our apartment, madame entered her bedroom, and I followed her. I paced the floor a long while without speaking. I wanted to see whether she would ask me about my son, for she must have guessed that I had been to Livry. But she did not say a word; she simply began to arrange her hair in curl papers.

I could stand it no longer. I went to her and said:

"Where have you been to-day, madame?"

"Why, wherever I chose, monsieur. I believe that I am not in the habit of asking you where you go!"

"That is no argument, madame, and I have the right to ask you for an account of your actions."

"Oho! a right! I had that right too, but when I undertook to exert it, it did not succeed!"

"I don't know what you mean, madame. However, you do not answer my question."

"I have been to dine with Madame Dorcelles; there was no mystery about it; I told the nurse, and I thought that you would call there for me."

"You could not think that I would go to the house of a woman whom I do not like; and you must have known too that you would not please me by dining with this Madame Dorcelles, who has the reputation of being a flirt and not a respectable mother of a family."

"Reputation! Was it Madame Ernest who told you that Laure was a flirt?"

"Madame Ernest never speaks ill of anyone."

"She has her reasons for that."

"For heaven's sake, let us drop Madame Ernest, whom I almost never see."

"Oh! that is a matter of indifference to me now."

"I can well believe it; you have other things to occupy your mind."

"What do you mean by that, monsieur?"

"If you should find me escorting a woman home as I just now found you with Monsieur Dulac, I should like to know what you would say?"

"Mon Dieu! do you mean to say that you are jealous, you, monsieur, who considered it so absurd that I should be?"

"Without being jealous, madame, I may look to it that you do not expose yourself to malicious gossip."

"Oh! I am obliged to you, monsieur, but I am old enough to know how to behave."

"You are becoming most peculiar, Eugénie; I don't know whose advice you are following, but I cannot believe that you act thus of your own accord; I doubt, however, whether this new method of treating me will make either of us happy. Upon my word, I do not recognize you."

"I have said that of you for a very long time, monsieur!"

"I can understand your not being the same to me; but with your children! Why, you have not asked me anything about our son!"

"Could I guess that you had been to see him?"

"You leave little Henriette here, you abandon her to the care of a maid!"

"As if one could always drag a child about, when one goes into society!"

"*Drag about!* Ah! I prefer to believe, madame, that that word does not come from you; it was probably Madame Dorcelles who taught it to you, in speaking of her own children!"

"It is doubtless because Laure is one of my school friends that you do not like her, and that you say unkind things about her; but I warn you, monsieur, that that will not prevent me from seeing her and from going to her house whenever I please."

"But if I should forbid you?"

"That would be an additional reason for me to do it."

"Magnificent, madame! Go your own way and I will go mine."

"Go where you please, it is all one to me!"

I made the circuit of the room once more, then left madame, who continued to adjust her curl papers.

XV

A WOMAN'S SERVICE

Six months had passed, during which I had sought enjoyment apart from my wife. At first that course of proceeding was the result of our quarrel on the evening when I returned from Livry; afterward, spite and self-esteem took a hand. One is never willing to take the first step, especially when one has no reason for self-reproach. And yet that mode of life was very far from being pleasant to me; it was not at all in accordance with my tastes. The idea of being obliged to seek happiness away from my

Eugénie and my family, I, who still loved my wife and adored my children! But to think of Eugénie behaving in that way! I wondered if she enjoyed going nowhere with me? Every day I hoped that she would come to me in my study and throw herself into my arms; but I hoped in vain. Then I had paroxysms of anger, of vexation; I swore that I would think no more of her, and I returned home still thinking of her.

She could not say that I annoyed her in any way, that I prevented her from doing as she pleased. I was determined to deprive her of every cause of complaint. Often I had no idea where she went; but I could not believe that Eugénie would ever forget what she owed to herself, or would fail in her duty; if she did, then she would deserve my contempt and not my love. Thus it is that a person is always foolish to be jealous; for either the jealousy is unfounded, or the suspected person does not deserve that one should worry about him.

Despite this reasoning, which I indulged in when I was calm, I confess that I sometimes thought of Monsieur Dulac. That evening when he held Eugénie's hand in his had not vanished from my thoughts. But there are so many young men who pay court to all the ladies, as a matter of habit, without anything coming of it! I believed that he was one of them. I seemed to remember that when I was a bachelor, I could not see a pretty woman without trying to make love to her. However, Monsieur Dulac came much less often to my house. I did not know whether he continued to escort Eugénie home, for I was not there.

Ernest and his little Marguerite had gone to pass the summer in the country, in a solitary region where they saw no one but each other and their children; but they were never bored together; how I envied their happiness!

I avoided Bélan, for he annoyed me; one day he believed that he was betrayed, the next day he was certain of his wife's loyalty. I could not understand how a man could remain in that condition; if I had had the one-hundredth part of his reasons for being jealous, I would long ago have found out the truth of the matter.

Nor did I enjoy meeting the Girauds; the sight of them reminded me of too many epochs of my life. Giraud never saw me without finding a way to insinuate a complimentary remark about my wedding, and the magnificence of the supper during the ball. It vexed me to hear that day mentioned; moreover, it seemed to me that there was a touch of malice, of mockery, in their manner of congratulating me on my good fortune. Perhaps I saw things in the wrong light.

In general, society afforded me little amusement. I went about to forget myself, but I enjoyed the theatre much more; there a man may do what he pleases: he may listen or think. Sometimes I took my little Henriette there; she seemed already to understand the plays, and I was so happy when I had my daughter by my side! I had also been to Livry again, to see my son; but he was not yet old enough to understand me and to answer me as his sister did.

I went occasionally to my mother's. I had never mentioned my domestic troubles to her; what would be the use? One should keep such things to himself as much as possible. My mother would have told me that I was old enough to know how to manage my wife and my household. I did not want her to make the slightest remonstrance to her daughter-in-law. For I knew that a mother-in-law's advice is very rarely listened to. It was much better therefore to say nothing, and that is what I did.

Winter had come again, and with it balls and receptions. Eugénie determined to set apart one day in the week to receive our numerous acquaintances. I allowed her to invite whom she chose. There were moments when I thought that she was touched by my readiness to satisfy all her wishes; I saw that she was sometimes sad and pensive and preoccupied; but I saw no sign of coming back to me, although she was more free and gentle with me; on the contrary, she seemed to avoid me more, and to dread any manifestations of affection on my part. I wondered what could be taking place in her heart.

Dulac came to our house very often. That young man had become a terrible bore to me. He seemed to be always there, between Eugénie and me. But how could I forbid him the house? He was exceedingly polite to me and most obliging to my wife. Everybody liked him; I alone did not agree with the rest of the world.

Madame Dorcelles came to our house sometimes, but I could not see that my wife saw her any more frequently; on the contrary, I was inclined to think that she saw less of her and I was very grateful to her. Madame Dorcelles attempted to play the coquette with me; she called me a savage, a misanthrope; I allowed her to call me what she chose, and paid no attention to her ogling and her fascinations. I could not help thinking that my wife had in her a most peculiar friend.

I determined to make an effort to accompany my wife into society. It vexed me that that Dulac should almost always be her escort.

Eugénie seemed surprised by my new course of action, but she said nothing. I could not make up my mind whether it pleased her, but I fancied that I detected an exchange of glances between her and Monsieur Dulac.

Ah! if I had been sure of it! I fumed and raged anew; but I very soon came to myself, and told myself that I was a fool.

There was some talk of a magic lantern exhibition at the house of a lady friend of ours who had a very fine one; she thought that it would amuse the children and perhaps the grown people as well; so an evening was chosen for that purpose.

I escorted my wife; she was depressed, or rather, sullen; we took Henriette, who was overjoyed at the prospect, and I was glad for her.

We found among the company the Bélans, the Girauds, and the inevitable Dulac. That man seemed to pursue me everywhere! It seemed to me that he must always disturb by his presence the pleasure to which I looked forward. I began to detest him.

After remaining some time in the salon, we were requested to step into the dining-room where the magic lantern was prepared. The company passed into that room, where there was almost no light, because darkness is necessary for the better exhibition of the lantern.

The ladies were seated, the men remained standing. We all laughed in anticipation of what we were about to see. Some of the gentlemen imitated Polichinello, or the devil; they favored us with a performance before the curtain rose. The darkness that reigned in the room seemed to increase the merriment of many people.

Giraud, who was beside me, whispered in my ear:

"The scenes of the lantern won't be the most amusing ones. Look, there is Madame Bélan with monsieur le marquis over in the corner. It is very amusing. Poor Bélan! but he has just the face for that."

Such jests no longer made me laugh. I looked about for my wife; I was confident that Monsieur Dulac had

not left the salon, where he was playing écarté, and I was reassured.

The performance began. More people had arrived and we were so crowded that we could not move.

They showed us the sun and the moon, Pierrot and the devil, Cupid and the wild man. The gentleman who explained the pictures made endless speeches. The children shrieked for joy, and the ladies laughed heartily. To me it seemed very long and tedious; I could not stir from my place to go to my wife, and it was darker than ever.

Suddenly, in the very midst of his explanation, the gentleman pushed the lantern too far, so that it fell from the table to the floor; the lights were at once uncovered and the room was suddenly illuminated.

I instantly turned my eyes toward my wife. Monsieur Dulac was seated behind her, but one of her arms was hanging over her chair and her hand was in her neighbor's.

I started up so suddenly to go to Eugénie that I trod upon Giraud's feet, he was so close to me. He uttered a piercing shriek and declared that I had hurt him. I did not think of apologizing; I forced a passage to my wife's side; her arm was no longer over the back of her chair and Monsieur Dulac was farther away.

I do not know how I looked at them, but Eugénie seemed perturbed and Monsieur Dulac's face wore a most embarrassed expression.

"Take your shawl," I said abruptly to my wife; "call your daughter and let us go."

"Why are we going so soon?" asked Eugénie, looking at me in surprise.

"Because I wish it, madame. Come, no comments, but make haste."

The tone in which I said this was so new to Eugénie's ears that she rose at once to obey; moreover, people might have heard me speaking to her in that tone and I fancy that she did not desire that.

She was ready in a moment; I took my daughter's hand, and we prepared to go.

"Are you going already?" asked the mistress of the house. "Why, it isn't all over, he is going to mend the lantern."

"We cannot stay any longer," I said, curtly enough.

"I do not feel very well," murmured Eugénie; "we must go."

I did not say a word to my wife on the way home, for our daughter was with us. Poor child! I had deprived her of a part of the pleasure which she had anticipated, but she dared not complain.

When we were at home and her daughter was in bed, Eugénie said to me in a bitter tone:

"May I know why you dragged me away so abruptly from the party where we were?"

"May I know, madame, why your hand was in Monsieur Dulac's, while the room was dark?"

"My hand in Monsieur Dulac's? You dreamed it!"

"No, madame, I did not dream it; I saw it, and saw it very distinctly."

"I do not know but that Monsieur Dulac did take my hand, by accident or in jest. I certainly did not notice it! So that was why you rushed up like a madman, and spoke to me in a threatening tone, as if you were going to strike me; that is why you drew everybody's eyes upon me, is it? No one accustomed to society was ever before known to behave as you did!"

"Madame, when I consider myself insulted, I pay little heed to society. There was a time when you thought

and acted in the same way. I do not know what sort of jesting Monsieur Dulac presumes to indulge in with you, but I warn you that I don't like it. I request you not to allow it any more."

"You expect me to mention your idiotic ideas to that young man? I will do nothing of the kind! It is perfectly absurd."

"Very well; whenever it suits me, I shall not hesitate to turn the fellow out of doors."

"I advise you to do it! The idea of turning that young man out of doors because he is pleasant and agreeable and attentive to me! You only lack that, to give you a most excellent reputation in society!"

"Be careful, madame, that you do not give me a reputation which I should like still less."

"It seems to me that it is hardly worth while to go with me in order to indulge in such scenes. Formerly you went your way, monsieur, and I went mine."

"I shall go with you whenever it suits me, madame. I am well aware that it will be a terrible nuisance to you, and I am very sorry; but you will go nowhere without me if I choose that you shall not."

"Oho! we will see about that!"

I went to my room. I did not sleep that night, I constantly saw that young man with my wife. And yet what Eugénie had told me was probable enough and might be true. But a thousand circumstances, which I remembered now, revived my suspicions when I tried to banish them.

Suppose that she were deceiving me! At that thought, a shudder ran through my whole being, and, since the evening before, I bore a heavy weight which oppressed and suffocated me.

Such torture! I was determined to know, to make sure whether I was betrayed.

But to make sure was no easy matter; women are so cunning in taking precautions! Not always, however; they who are not accustomed to intrigues sometimes allow themselves to be detected. So I was jealous at last! a jealous husband! I who had so often laughed at the type, and who had deceived so many! My turn had come! And if I were—ah! I did not know what I should do! Formerly I used to laugh about it, it all seemed so simple and so natural to me! We never put ourselves in the places of those at whom we laugh. To be sure, there are some who take the thing so indifferently, others who joke about it. Husbands of the latter class have ceased to love their wives. But the wisest, the most sensible, do not try to make sure. On the contrary, they carefully avoid everything that might disturb their peace of mind by opening their eyes. Ah! those who act thus are very wise; why should I not do as they did?

After that long and painful night I shut myself up in my study and tried to distract my thoughts in business. It was not ten o'clock when Bélan appeared; nothing could have been more disagreeable to me at that moment than his presence. He threw himself into an armchair, and said:

"This time, my dear fellow, it is impossible for me to doubt it; I am a cuckold!"

At that exordium I sprang from my chair and began to pace the floor, exclaiming testily:

"Morbleu! monsieur, you have been saying that so long that it would be very strange if you weren't."

Bélan stared at me and muttered:

"If that's the kind of advice you give me!—Indeed! so that's your opinion, is it?"

"I have no opinion or advice to give you. There are times when a man should look to nobody for advice but

himself. What I can't conceive is that a man should go about proclaiming his shame as you do."

"Proclaiming! what does that mean, I pray to know? Because I come to confide my troubles to a friend, you call it proclaiming my shame! Look you! I don't care to be a cuckold myself; every man has his own way of looking at things. I know very well that there are some husbands to whom it doesn't make any difference, who let their wives go about with their lovers and seem to pay no attention to it."

I had listened to Bélan impatiently; at that moment I could contain myself no longer; I jumped at him, seized him by the collar, and shook him violently, crying:

"Did you come here to say that for my benefit, monsieur? Do you mean to insult me and to include me among those obliging husbands to whom you refer? Morbleu! Monsieur Bélan, I am in no mood to endure any impertinence on that subject."

The poor little man had submitted to be shaken, being totally unable to defend himself, he was so dazed by my action. At last he cried out, gazing at me in dismay:

"Blémont, my friend, what on earth is the matter with you? You certainly are ill; you are not yourself!"

I relaxed my hold, and, ashamed of my outbreak of wrath, I threw myself in a chair and faltered:

"Yes—yes—I am not well. I thought that you meant to insult me—but——"

"I, mean to insult an old friend, when I came to confide my domestic unhappiness to him. You cause me grief, Blémont, you affect me. However, if you really think that I intended to jest about your—In the first place, I didn't know that there was any excuse for jesting about you. However, if you want satisfaction, you know that I am not a fellow to retreat, I have furnished

my proofs. I avoided the artilleryman, it is true, but one doesn't fight with a stranger; with a friend it's a very different matter."

I gave Bélan my hand, saying:

"I tell you again, I don't know what got into me. You and I fight! No, no, my dear Bélan, let us forget it all."

Bélan shook my hand warmly.

"Let's forget it, so I say, and shake hands. Yes, my dear fellow, I think that we may shake hands—most cordially. I will leave you, as you are preoccupied and engrossed by—er—disagreeable thoughts.—Perfidious Armide! Traitorous Armide! Pope was quite right!—Have you read Pope, my friend?"

"I—I don't know. I think so."

"If I had read him sooner, I should have looked twice before marrying. Do you remember what he says of women?"

"No."

"Well, he says that every woman has a dissolute heart. What do you think of that?"

"I think that it is not polite."

"But I fear that it is true. For instance, Armide has a dissolute heart; your wife also has a——"

"For God's sake, Bélan, let us drop that subject!"

"Yes, I will tell you about my new discoveries some other time. Oh! these women! how sly they are! But you know that as well as I. Au revoir, my dear fellow."

He did well to leave me; I was on the point of jumping at his throat again. Was it possible that I could not listen to a word about betrayed husbands, or unfaithful wives, without flying into a passion? I felt that I must keep a tight hold upon myself, that I must be cool and sensible; but I must also know the truth concerning the liaison between Eugénie and Monsieur Dulac.

Eugénie and I no longer spoke to each other except to make bitter, sneering remarks; most of the time we said nothing. Notwithstanding all that, I went everywhere with my wife; I would not allow her to go out without me. But in society I had that depressed, pensive manner which prevents one from being agreeable; for we met Monsieur Dulac at almost every party which we attended. If I played cards, I was inattentive to the game, because I was constantly looking about for my wife, to see if he was speaking to her, if he was with her. If she was playing, I sat by her side, to make sure that no one else should take that place. If she danced, and it happened to be with Monsieur Dulac, I compelled her to leave the ball abruptly and she dared not resist, for she could read in my eyes that I would make a scene before the whole assemblage. I am sure that I was universally esteemed a morose, ill-tempered, jealous bear, and that people said of Eugénie: "Poor little woman! her husband makes her very unhappy! he's a tyrant! he's a miserable fellow!"—Yes, people undoubtedly said such things of me; for the world almost always judges by appearances.

Only when caressing my daughter did I enjoy a moment's happiness. Dear child! if I had been deprived of your caresses, what would have been left for me on earth? Her brother was still too young to understand me; but she seemed to read my unhappiness in my eyes, and to try to divert me from my sorrow by her soft words.

One morning, fatigued by a sleepless night, and even more by my thoughts, I dressed, and, contrary to my usual custom—which was to remain in my study until ten o'clock, I left the house before eight.

Chance—destiny, perhaps—led me to walk in the direction of Boulevard du Temple. At first I thought of going to see my mother; but I reflected that it was much

too early, as she seldom rose before ten o'clock. I concluded that it would be better to call on my friends on Rue du Temple; it was more than six months since I had seen them. So I walked to Ernest's house, where I was told that he had moved, and that he now lived on Boulevard Saint-Martin.

I was about to go thither, when a woman in a cap and morning jacket, with a bowl of milk in her hand, nodded to me as she passed.

I turned; it was Lucile. I had not seen her since the day that my wife surprised us together on the Terrasse des Feuillants. She had turned and stopped; she was smiling at me. As I no longer feared that my wife was watching me, I walked back to bid Lucile good-morning.

"We don't meet at the Tuileries this time."

"No—that was a long while ago!—Do you think that I have changed?"

"Why, no; you are still charming."

"Oh! how gallant monsieur is to-day! For my part, I must confess that you look thinner and paler. Marriage hasn't been a great success with you, I should say."

"Perhaps not. Do you live hereabout now?"

"Yes, on Rue Basse-du-Temple, and I came out to get my milk. What would you have? I am getting economical, I don't keep a maid now! Will you come to breakfast with me? I will give you some coffee."

"No, I can't; I must go home."

"Are you still afraid of being scolded, or followed, by your wife?"

"Oh, no! I assure you."

"I believe you! She has something else to do than follow you!—Ha! ha! ha! poor Henri!"

When Lucile laughed I felt the blood rushing to my face; but I determined to restrain myself.

"Why do you laugh, Lucile? I don't see how you can know it, even if my wife has many things to do."

"I know more about it than you, perhaps. I am better informed than you imagine."

"In the first place, you don't know my wife."

"I don't know her! I saw her once on the Terrasse des Feuillants, and once is enough for me to recognize a person; I give you my word that I have recognized her perfectly since, and that I am not mistaken."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that your wife plays her little games like other people. Parbleu! I suppose you thought that you were a privileged mortal, didn't you? No, monsieur, she has given you horns to wear, and she has done it very neatly too."

I strove to conceal the torture I felt and answered:

"You enjoy saying spiteful things to me; that is your habit; but you would be sorely embarrassed to prove your slanderous remarks about my wife."

"Slanderous! No, monsieur, there is no slander about it. Your wife looked to me like a drab the first time I saw her; but I wouldn't have said anything about her if I hadn't been sure of my facts. I can't say that I am sorry that your wife has lovers; I should lie if I said that; but still it wasn't I who told her to give you your horns—she didn't need my advice for that."

"This is too much, Lucile! You must prove what you have told me, and prove it instantly."

"Oh! what a hurry you are in, monsieur! I never hurry, myself. If you want me to answer you, you must come to my room first of all; I must have my coffee, I am hungry."

Lucile walked toward her house; I followed her, saying to myself every minute:

"I must restrain myself, I must be a man; and if she has told me the truth, I must still try to act with prudence."

Lucile entered a house with a passageway at the side, near Rue de Crussol. She went up to the third floor, opened her door, and ushered me into a modestly furnished, but neat and well-kept room. She went to the fireplace, blew up her fire and prepared to boil her coffee. I seized her arm and stopped her.

"Will you leave me to suffer any longer, Lucile? I implore you, tell me all that you know about my wife!"

She looked at me; she seemed distressed.

"Mon Dieu! what a state you are in, Henri! If I had known it would have such an effect on you, I wouldn't have told you. How stupid it is to feel badly over such a small matter! Your wife goes her way and you go yours—isn't that the custom? You have mighty little philosophy!"

"I shall have enough when I am certain of my fate. Once more—speak!"

"Well, come to the window. Look: do you see that little low door over there?"

"Yes."

"That is the rear entrance of a restaurant, a café, where there are private rooms—one of those assignation houses, you know."

"I understand you."

"If you go in this way, you are not seen, for you don't go into the café at all. You go right upstairs; a bell calls a waiter, who opens a private room for you. Oh! it's very convenient. I used to go there often."

"Well?"

"Well! your wife goes there to meet her lover."

"My wife! It is false!"

"Oh! I recognized her perfectly, although she generally comes in a cab and gets out a few steps away. She is always hidden by a broad-brimmed hat and wrapped in a shawl; but first of all I noticed her manner; I watched her. It amuses me to watch the lovers who go there. I haven't anything to do, and it serves to pass the time! Yes, I am sure that it's she. She hasn't been there once only, but at least ten times."

"What time does she come?"

"Usually it is only quarter-past, or half-past seven when she arrives, and she stays about an hour."

"What a lie! my wife never gets up before nine o'clock."

"So you think, my dear man! You imagine that she's asleep.—What if I should tell you that she is over there now?"

"Now?"

"Yes; I saw her go in half an hour before I met you. Stay at the window; you will see a cab come that they will have sent for; madame will get in, and the gentleman will go away five minutes later. I know the whole programme."

"What sort of looking man is he?"

"A young man, tall and dark. He's very good-looking indeed; I must do your wife that justice."

I took my hat and strode toward the door. Lucile ran in front of me.

"Where are you going?"

"To make sure that it's they."

"You are going to make a row! Can you think of such a thing?"

"No, you don't know me. When I am certain of my misfortune, I shall be calm; but I propose to see them. Let me go, Lucile; I insist."

"Very well! on condition that I go with you. I know the house, and I will show you the way, be your guide. But you promise——"

"It's all right! come."

Lucile put on her bonnet and threw a shawl over her shoulders. We went downstairs and soon stood before the house opposite. We opened a small wooden gate which rang a bell; then we ascended a short flight of stairs. Lucile took my hand and walked before me. My heart beat so violently that I was obliged to stop to recover my breath.

We arrived in a courtyard, where an attendant was waiting for us under a porch; he went upstairs before us. When we reached the landing, I stopped him:

"You have a gentleman and lady here?"

The waiter looked at me, uncertain whether he should reply. I put twenty francs in his hand and repeated my question, describing the two persons.

"Oh! I know who you mean, monsieur. In fact we don't usually have anybody but them at this time of day. They're there—on the front."

"Give us a room next to theirs."

The waiter opened the door of a large room. How was I to see them? If there were only a partition between us! but it was a solid wall. No matter! I would at least see her go out. The waiter received orders to notify me when they sent for a cab.

What a situation! to be so near one's wife when she is in the arms of a lover! I was tempted to break down the door. But no, no, I determined to control myself, for my children's sake. But suppose it were not she? I went close to the wall and listened. I heard sounds, but could distinguish nothing. Lucile softly opened the door leading into the hall, and said, pointing to the next door:

"You can hear better there."

I walked to the door with the greatest caution and put my ear against it. Yes, I could hear very distinctly; they were kissing. And I made out these words:

"I must go now. I want to be in my room before monsieur leaves his study."

It was she, it was certainly she in that room! that voice went to my heart, it caused a revolution in my whole being.

I returned to Lucile. I do not know what had taken place within me, or what expression my face wore; but Lucile threw herself at my feet, weeping, and faltered:

"Forgive me! oh! forgive me! Great heaven! if I had only known! How sorry I am for what I've done!"

I made no reply; I could not speak. The bell rang in the next room and I listened.

The waiter answered the bell and they sent for a cab. I recognized Dulac's voice then. I tore my hair, but I restrained myself. The waiter came to me and told me when the cab was at the door; whereupon I left the room and waited at the foot of the stairs.

She came down at last; I heard the rustling of her dress. She had reached the last stair when I abruptly stepped in front of her and grasped her arm. Eugénie raised her eyes, and, terror-stricken, fell without a sound on the stairs.

I lifted her up, and put her, or rather, threw her into the cab; I gave the address to the driver, then I walked rapidly away as if I could not fly fast enough from that house where I had acquired proofs of my shame.

XVI

THE INEVITABLE RESULT

I walked a long time; thoroughly tired out, I stopped at last. I was in the country, in a lane bordered by hedges. I saw no houses; I had no idea where I was; but what did it matter? I sat down on the ground at the foot of a leafless tree; for nature was still dead, and there was no greenery about me.

I was alone; I rested my head on my hands and abandoned myself to my grief, to my despair. Why not confess? I shed tears, yes, I wept; but no one could see me, and it seemed to me that weeping afforded me some relief.

It was not her love alone that I regretted; it was the destruction of all my happiness, of all my future. My happiness! for some time past, it had ceased to exist; but I still flattered myself that it might live again; I still hoped for those pleasant days of confidence and love which had followed our wedding. But all was lost, and it was impossible that happiness should ever be born again for me. Impossible! ah! that is a cruel word; I could not believe that Eugénie had meant to condemn me to everlasting sorrow.

And yet there are many husbands who forgive or close their eyes to the infidelity of their wives. They themselves deceive their wives, and they think it quite natural that they should do likewise.

Ah! even if I had deceived Eugénie a thousand times, I could never have borne the thought of being deceived. If only, on yielding to their weakness, they did not cease to love us! But the new sentiment kills the old one. In proportion as they grow to love another, we become less lovable in their eyes, and ere long their hearts are entirely absorbed by their new passion.

I was resolved never to see her again; we must part, but without scandal, without noise. I had children, and it was for their sake that I determined to dissemble my unhappiness; it was for their sake that I had controlled myself that morning.

I might have struck Dulac, and a duel would have followed; but, after the remarks that had already been made, everybody would have divined the cause, the motive of the duel. I determined to find some other way of satisfying my thirst for vengeance, without publishing my dishonor before the eyes of the world.

I rose. There were moments when the rush of my thoughts distracted me from my misfortune and gave me new courage; but the next moment the arguments lost their force and I remembered all that I had lost. I saw myself alone on earth, when I had thought that the woman whom I adored loved me; I saw all my plans destroyed, all my dreams unfulfilled. Thereupon my heart broke, and my eyes filled with tears. I was like a person trying to climb out of an abyss, but constantly falling back to the bottom after every effort.

I walked on. I saw houses before me and a servant told me that I was at Montreuil. I looked at my watch: it was only noon. Great heaven! how the time would drag now!

I went into a sort of restaurant; I was not hungry, but I wanted to find some way of shortening the day; I

did not wish to return to Paris so early. It seemed to me that everybody would read my misfortune in my face; but I dreaded especially the returning to my house. I hoped, however, that I should not find her there. Her property would enable her to live comfortably; let her go, but let her leave me my children; I must have them; I believed that I had the right to take them away from their mother. In any event, it would be no great deprivation to her; she did not know how to love her children; in truth, she did not deserve that I should regret her.

I tried to eat, but it was impossible for me to swallow. I paid, and left the inn. I walked on, and then looked at my watch again; the time stood still. However, it was necessary for me to return to Paris sooner or later. I arrived there at three o'clock.

If she were still at my house, I felt that I could not endure her presence; I therefore determined to ascertain before going in.

It gave me a pang to see those boulevards again, and a still greater pang to see my home. I looked up at our windows. She used to sit there sometimes, watching for me, and smiling at me. Why was she not there now? Oh! if it only might all prove to be a dream, how happy I should be, what a relief it would be to me! but no, it was only too true, I no longer had a wife! there was no Eugénie for me! What had I done to her that she should make me so wretched?

Fool that I was! I was weeping again, although I was in the midst of Paris, amid that throng of people who would laugh at me if they knew the cause of my grief.

I must be a man, at least in the presence of other people.

I entered the house and accosted my concierge.

"Is madame at home?"

"No, monsieur, madame went away about ten o'clock, in a cab, with bundles and boxes, and with mademoiselle her daughter."

"My daughter? She took my daughter?"

"Yes, monsieur; it looked to me as if madame were going into the country. Didn't monsieur know it?"

I was no longer listening to the concierge. I went upstairs and rang violently. The maid admitted me; the poor girl began to tremble when she saw me.

"Your mistress has gone away?"

"Yes, monsieur, madame said that she was going into the country. In fact, when madame returned from the bath she looked very ill."

"From the bath?"

"Yes, monsieur, madame went out very early to go to the bath."

"Does she go often to the bath?"

"Why, yes, monsieur, quite often lately."

"Why did you never tell me?"

"Madame—told me not to."

"Oho! Well?"

"At first, madame shut herself up in her bedroom for a long time; then she called me and told me to pack up, and to make haste; then she told me to go and call a cab; she had the bundles taken down, and then she went away with her daughter, saying: 'Give this letter to monsieur.'"

"A letter! where is it?"

"I put it on your desk, monsieur."

I rushed to my study. There was the letter. What could she have to write to me? I broke the seal and looked for the marks of tears upon it, but there were none. She had left me, left me forever, without even

shedding a tear! My heart sickened. Ah! if heaven were just, I thought, the day would come when I should make her shed as bitter tears as I had shed. I read the letter.

“Monsieur, I have deceived you. I might perhaps deny it still, but I prefer to be more honest than you were with me. I am guilty, I know it; but except for your example, I never should have been. And, although in the eyes of the law, I am a greater culprit than you, I do not consider myself so. I realize that we can no longer live together. Indeed, I think that it will be a blessing to us both to part. I shall keep my daughter, and you your son. My fortune will suffice for me, and I shall never need to have recourse to yours. Adieu, monsieur, pray believe that I sincerely wish you happiness.

“EUGÉNIE.”

What a letter! not a word of regret, not a syllable of repentance! Well, so much the better; that gave me courage. But my daughter, my Henriette; so I must live without seeing and embracing her every day! What inhumanity! Eugénie knew how dearly I loved my daughter, and she had taken her away. It was not from maternal affection; no, she did not know what it was to love her children. So that it was simply to make me more unhappy. Henriette, dear child, you would no longer come and climb on my knees every morning; I could no longer pass my hand through your fair hair and hold your head against my breast; and, ceasing to see me, perhaps you will cease to love me.

I threw myself into a chair, and laid my head on my desk; I do not know how long I stayed in that position.

I heard the maid; the poor girl was standing behind my chair and had been talking to me for a long time, for all that I knew.

"What do you want?"

"Will not monsieur dine? It is after six o'clock; that is why I ventured—I was afraid that monsieur was ill."

"No, thanks, I will not dine. But what did my daughter say when she went away? What did she do, poor child?"

"Oh! she wanted to carry her doll, monsieur, but her mother would not let her; she told her that she would buy her another one."

"Is that all?"

"Then Mamzelle Henriette said: 'Why don't we wait for papa before we go to ride?'"

"Dear child, she thought of me!"

Those words did me good. I came to my senses. Eugénie had not said where she was going, but I could learn through her banker. I simply must know, and then we would see if she would refuse to give me back my daughter. I cast my weakness behind me and thought only of avenging myself on Dulac. I knew where he would be that evening. I was to take madame there. But suppose that she had written to him, suppose she had informed him of what had taken place? But no, her first thought had been to fly.

I asked the maid if madame had written any other letters; she did not know. Ah! if Dulac should escape me that evening! It was nearly seven o'clock, so I dressed to go out. To go into society! to pretend to be calm, to smile, when my heart was torn! But it would not be for long, I hoped.

I put a large sum of money in my pocket. It was still too early to go to an evening party, so I walked about

my apartment. "Accursed apartment," I said to myself, "where I began by being unhappy, you will not see me much longer!"

At last the clock struck eight; I left the house. The reception was at the house of the lady where the magic lantern had been exhibited. It was there that I had first had any enlightenment concerning my misfortune; it was just that I should be revenged there.

Some guests had arrived; but very few, and he was not among them. People asked me about madame; I said that she was not feeling well, and I took my place at a card table.

Whenever the door of the salon opened, I turned with an involuntary shudder. He did not come.

Bélan and Giraud arrived, and came to me to say good-evening; I pretended to be very intent upon the game, in order not to have to enter into conversation with them; but Bélan succeeded in coming close enough to me to whisper in my ear:

"My friend, I am not; everything has been explained to my perfect satisfaction. I will come some morning and tell you about it."

I contented myself with shaking his hand; a little convulsively, no doubt, for he withdrew his, saying:

"I am deeply touched by the pleasure which it gives you."

At last he appeared! he entered the salon and looked about; I divined whom he was looking for. He came toward me. Good! he knew nothing! He had the assurance to inquire for my wife's health, and why she had not come. I restrained myself, I said a few vague words in reply, and I walked away from him.

I waited until he took his place at the écarté table, which he did at last. I bet against him. At the second

deal, when we lost two points, I declared that our adversary had not cut the cards; I spoke as if I thought the cards had been stacked. The others looked at one another in amazement, and said nothing. Monsieur Dulac became thoughtful and distraught; he proposed to throw the hand out, but I refused.

We lost. I instantly took the vacant seat. I trebled my stake, so that the bettors should not bet on me; then I held my cards so that nobody could see them. I discarded my aces in order to lose. I demanded my revenge, and although it is customary to leave the table when one loses, I did not rise, and I doubled my stake again, indulging in more epigrams on my adversary's good luck.

Monsieur Dulac showed great patience; he seemed ill at ease, but he said nothing. I lost again; I assumed the air of a determined gambler and increased my stake again. Again I lost; thereupon I rose and threw my cards in my adversary's face.

It was impossible to take that peacefully. Dulac rose in his turn and asked me if I had intended to insult him. I laughed in his face and made no reply. Others tried to adjust the affair by representing to him that I was a bad loser and that my losses had irritated me. I saw plainly that everybody thought me in the wrong. Dulac said nothing, nor did I. I had done enough in public amply to explain a subsequent duel.

After a few moments I walked up to Dulac and said to him in an undertone:

"I shall await you to-morrow, at seven o'clock, with a friend, at the entrance to the forest of Vincennes; do not fail to be there, and be sure that this affair cannot be adjusted."

He bowed in assent; I walked about the salon once or twice, then disappeared.

I required a second ; my choice was already made ; our real friends are never so numerous as to cause us embarrassment.

I went to see Ernest at his new home. They had gone out, they were at the theatre with their children. But they kept a servant now. I decided to wait for them, for I felt that I must see Ernest that evening.

The certainty of vengeance near at hand, or of an end of my troubles, calmed my passions a little. I reflected on my situation. I was going to fight. If I killed my opponent, that would not give me back my happiness. If he killed me, my children would be delivered over to the tender mercies of a mother who did not love them ; so that even that duel could not have a satisfactory result. Was it really necessary ? Yes, because I abhorred Dulac now. And yet he had only played the part of a young man, he had done only what I myself had done when I had been a bachelor. My wife was much the guiltier, and her I could not punish.

I had nothing to write, in case I should be killed ; for my children would inherit all my property. I prayed that they might always remain in ignorance of their mother's sin.

How much misery may result from an instant's weakness ! If a woman could ever calculate it, would she be guilty ? But did I myself calculate it before my marriage ? No ; we must have passions and torments and excitement. A pure and tranquil happiness would bore us, and yet there are some people who know that happiness ; there are privileged beings ; and there are some too who have no passions, who love as they eat, or drink, or sleep. Having no knowledge of veritable love, they do not suffer its torments ; perhaps they are the happier for it.

After five years and a few months of married life, and a love marriage, too! She seemed to love me so dearly! was it not real love at that time? If not, what constrained her to tell me so and to marry me? Her mother did only as she wished. The woman who is forced to give her hand to a man whom she does not love is much less guilty when she betrays her faith. But to manifest so much love for me, and—But no, I must forget all that.

Ernest and his wife returned from the play, and were told that a gentleman was waiting for them in their salon. They came in and exclaimed in surprise when they saw me:

“Why, it is Blémont!”

“It is Monsieur Henri! How long it is since we have seen you! how do you happen to come so late?”

“I wanted to see you; I have a favor to ask of Ernest.”

They both looked at me and both came toward me simultaneously.

“What’s the matter, pray? What has happened to you?”

“How pale he is, and how distressed!”

“Nothing is the matter.”

“Oh! yes, my friend, something is wrong; is your wife sick? or your children?”

“I no longer have a wife, I have no children with me; I am alone now.”

“What do you say?” cried Marguerite; “your wife?”

“She has deceived me, betrayed me; she is no longer with me.”

They did not say a word; they seemed thunderstruck. I rose and continued in a firmer voice:

“Yes, she has deceived me, that same Eugénie, whom I loved so dearly; you know how dearly, you who were the confidants of my love. It was only this morning that

I obtained proofs of her perfidy. I am not used to suffering as yet; I shall get used to it perhaps; but I swear, I will do my utmost to forget a woman who is not worthy of me. I have been unfortunate in love; I shall at least find some relief in friendship."

Ernest and Marguerite threw themselves into my arms; Marguerite wept and Ernest pressed my hand affectionately. At last I released myself from their embrace.

"It is late, my friends; forgive me for coming thus to disturb your happiness. Good-night, my little neighbor.—Ernest, a word with you, please."

He followed me to a window.

"I am to fight to-morrow; you can guess with whom and for what reason. I need not tell you that there is no possible adjustment, although we are supposed to be fighting because of a dispute at cards. Will you be my second?"

"Yes, of course."

"I shall expect you to-morrow morning, promptly at seven o'clock."

"I will be on time."

Marguerite had gone into another room. She returned at that moment and said:

"Don't you wish to kiss our children before you go?"

At that suggestion, tears came to my eyes; for I reflected that I could not kiss my daughter before going to bed that night.

Marguerite evidently divined my thought.

"Oh! pray forgive me," she said; "I have pained you. Oh dear! I didn't mean to."

I pressed her hand, nodded to Ernest, and hurried from the room.

Once more I was compelled to return to that apartment. It was torture to me. How empty it seemed!

and in fact it was empty; no wife, no child about me. It was not Eugénie whom my eyes sought; she had avoided and shunned my presence for a long while. It was my daughter, my little Henriette—she did not avoid me! What a miserable night I passed! not a moment's sleep. I wondered if she who made me so unhappy was sleeping quietly.

At last the day came, and at six o'clock Ernest was at my house. I took my pistols; a cab was below, and I told the driver to go to Vincennes.

I did not say a word during the drive. Just as we arrived, Ernest said to me:

"If you should fall, my friend, have you nothing to say, no orders to give?"

"No, my dear Ernest, for except you and your wife, no one really cares for me. My son is not old enough to understand the loss he would sustain. My daughter—she would cry perhaps, and that is why nothing must be said to her. Poor child! I do not want to make her shed a tear."

We arrived, and I saw two men walking to and fro a few gun shots from the château; they were Dulac and his second. We hurried toward them and joined them; they bowed to us; I did not respond to the salute, but strode on toward the woods.

I did not know Dulac's second; he was not one of our circle; so much the better. I do not know what Dulac had said to him, but I am convinced that he was not deceived as to the motive which had caused me to pick a quarrel with him the night before.

We stopped; the seconds gave us the weapons after examining them; then they measured off the distance.

"Fire, monsieur," I said to Dulac; "I am the aggressor."

"No, monsieur," he replied coldly; "it is for you to fire first, you are the insulted party."

I did not wait for him to say it again; I fired and missed him. It was his turn; he hesitated.

"Fire," I said to him; "remember, monsieur, that this affair cannot end thus."

He fired. I was not hit. Ernest handed me another pistol. I aimed at Dulac again, I pulled the trigger, and he fell.

I am not naturally cruel, but I wished that I had killed him.

XVII

A NEW CAUSE FOR UNHAPPINESS.—AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

I left the wood at once; Ernest followed me, after telling Dulac's second that he would send somebody to him.

At last, fate had been just; my thirst for vengeance had been satisfied. I should have felt a little relieved, but I did not; it was because I was not avenged on her who had injured me most. I thanked Ernest and left him, promising him to go often to his house. He insisted that I should come that very day to dine with them; but I felt that I must be alone a little longer. I would go when I had learned to endure, or at least to conceal, my sorrow.

I looked for an apartment in Ernest's neighborhood, far away from that in which I had lived. I hired the first vacant one that I found, then returned home. I went to

my landlord and paid what he demanded to allow me to move at once. At last I was free. I ordered my furniture to be moved instantly.

I dismissed my servant. I had no reason to complain of her, far from it; but she had been in my service during the time that I was determined to forget; I did not want to see her again. At last I was free. I gave her enough to enable her to wait patiently for other employment.

My furniture was taken to my new apartment on Rue Saint-Louis. I installed myself there. I felt better at once, for I breathed more freely there. There is nothing like change, for diseases of the heart as well as for those of the body.

I would have liked to go to see my son, but it was too late to start for Livry that day. I went to Eugénie's banker to try to find out where she was. I wanted to write to her, I wanted her to give me back my daughter. Two children would be none too many to take the place of all that I had lost.

The banker was a most excellent man. I was careful not to tell him the real cause of my separation from my wife. I gave him to understand that our dispositions and our tastes had changed, and we had both thought it best to adopt that course, which was irrevocable. So that it was not for the purpose of running after my wife that I wanted to know where she was, but simply to write to her on the subject of some business matters which we had not been able to adjust.

He did not know where Eugénie was; she had not written to him; but he promised to send me her address as soon as he knew it.

So I was forced to wait before seeing my daughter. If I had had her with me, it seemed to me that I might

recover all my courage and be happy again. Yes, I believed that I could be happy again, embracing that sweet child. If only I had her portrait. I had often had an idea of painting her, but business or quarrels with her mother had prevented me from beginning the work. "I will wait a few days," I thought; "then the original will return to me, and I will not part from her again."

My regret at not having painted her portrait reminded me of that other which I always carried with me. I determined to shatter it as she had shattered mine long ago.

Eugénie's portrait was set inside a locket. I took it out, opened it, and in spite of myself, my eyes rested upon that miniature, which reproduced her features so exactly. I do not know how it happened, but my rage faded away. I felt moved, melted. Ah! that was not the woman who had betrayed and abandoned me! that was the woman who had loved me, who had responded so heartily to my passion, whose eyes were always seeking mine! That Eugénie of the old days was a different person from the Eugénie of to-day; why then should I destroy her portrait? I looked about me; I was alone. My lips were once more pressed upon that face. It was a shameful weakness; but I persuaded myself that I saw her once more as she was five years before; and that delusion afforded me a moment's happiness.

Early the next morning I started for Livry. That road recalled many memories. My son was only eleven months old; but I determined that as soon as it could be done without injuring his health, I would take him away from his nurse, and not go to that place any more.

I reached the peasants' house. They asked me about my wife as before. I cut their questions short by telling them that she had gone on a long journey. Then I asked for my son. They brought little Eugène to me. I took

him in my arms and was about to cover him with kisses, when suddenly a new idea, a heartrending thought passed through my mind; my features altered, I put aside the child, who was holding out his arms to me, and replaced him in his nurse's arms.

That worthy woman utterly failed to understand the change which had taken place in me. She gazed at me and cried:

"Well! what's the matter? You give me back your son without kissing him! Why, he is a pretty little fellow, poor child!"

"My son!" I said to myself, "my son! he is only eleven months old, and Dulac began coming to the house before Eugénie was enceinte."

A new suspicion had come to aggravate my suffering. Who could assure me that that was my child? that I was not on the point of embracing the fruit of their guilty intercourse?

At that thought I sprang to my feet.

"Are you sick, monsieur?" the nurse asked me.

I did not answer her, but left the house. I walked about for some time in the fields. I realized that thenceforth I should not be able to think of my son without being haunted by that cruel thought; when I embraced the child, that suspicion would poison my happiness, and would diminish the affection that I should otherwise have had for him. And these women claim that they are no more guilty than we are! Ah! they are always sure when they are mothers; they are not afraid lest they may lavish their caresses on a stranger's child. That is one great advantage that they have over us. But nature does not do everything; one becomes a father by adopting an innocent little creature; and he who neglects and abandons his children ceases to be a father.

I returned to the nurse's house, somewhat calmer.

The poor woman was sitting in a corner with the child in her arms; she dared not bring him to me again.

I went to her and kissed the child on the forehead, heaving a profound sigh. I commended him to the peasants' care, I gave them money, and I returned to Paris more depressed than ever.

I found Ernest at my rooms waiting for me. He had been to my former home, had learned my new address, and had been looking for me everywhere since the morning, to divert me and comfort me.

"What do people say in society?"

That was my first question when I saw him; for I confess that my greatest dread was that people should know that my wife had deceived me, and it was much less on my own account than on hers that I dreaded it.

I did not wish that she should be held guilty in the eyes of society; it was quite enough that she should be guilty to my knowledge; so I begged Ernest to conceal nothing from me.

"Your duel is known," he said, "but it is attributed to the quarrel you had at the card table. You are generally blamed, and people are sorry for your adversary. Dulac is not dead; indeed, it is thought that he will recover; but he is seriously wounded, and he will be in bed for a long while. I do not know how it happened that Giraud knew of your change of abode, and that you have moved here without your wife. He questioned the concierges, no doubt. He has been about everywhere, telling of it. People are talking; and everyone makes up his own story; the majority think that you made your wife so unhappy that she was obliged to leave you."

"So much the better; let people think that, and let them put all the blame on me; that is what I want. Only

you and your wife know the truth, my dear Ernest; and I am very sure that you will not betray my confidence."

"No, of course not; although it makes me angry to hear people accuse you and pity your wife. If I were in your place, I am not sure that I should be so generous."

"But my children, my friend, my daughter!"

"That is so; I didn't think of them."

"What do I care for the blame of society? it will see little of me at present!"

"I trust, however, that you are not going to become a misanthrope, but that you will try to amuse yourself, and try to forget a woman who does not deserve your regrets; to act otherwise would be inexcusable weakness."

"I promise to try to follow your advice."

"To begin with, you must come home to dinner with me."

I could not refuse Ernest, although solitude was all that I now desired. I went home with him. His companion overwhelmed me with attentions and friendliness; their children came to caress and to play with me. During dinner they did all that they could to divert my thoughts. I was touched by their friendship, but the sight of their domestic happiness, of that happy family, was not adapted to alleviate my pain; on the contrary, it increased it twofold. For I too had a wife and children! Ah! such pictures were not what I wanted to see; they broke my heart. What I wanted was a crowd, uproar, noisy amusements; I needed to be bewildered, not moved.

I left my good friends early. Three days later I received a letter from Eugénie's banker; he informed me that she was temporarily at Aubonne, near Montmorency. So I knew where my daughter was, and that did me good; it always seems that we are less distant from

people when we know where they are. I remembered that an old kinswoman of Eugénie's mother lived at Aubonne; she was probably living with her. I did not know whether she would remain there, but I determined to write to her at once.

I sat down at my desk. I did not know how to begin, for it was the first time that I had ever written to Eugénie. We had never been separated. I did not propose to indulge in any reproaches in regard to her conduct. What good would it do? One should never complain, except when one is willing to forgive. I would go straight to the point, without beating about the bush.

“Madame, you have taken my daughter away; I wish, I insist, that she should remain with me. Keep your son; you can give him that name; but ought I too to call him my son? Take that child, and give me back my daughter. It will be no deprivation to you; besides, I will allow her to go to see her mother whenever you wish. I trust, madame, that I shall not be obliged to write to you a second time.”

I signed this letter and sent it at once to the post; I was impatient to have a reply.

I could no longer attend to business, so I abandoned my profession. I had enough to live on, now that I no longer proposed to keep house or to receive company. But what should I do to employ the time, which is so long when one suffers? I would return to my brushes; yes, I would cultivate once more that consoling art; I would give myself up to it entirely, and it would make my time pass happily. That idea pleased me; it seemed to me like returning to my bachelor life. But for my children, I would have left France and have travelled for

some time; but my daughter was still too young for me to subject her to changes of climate which might injure her health.

Two days had not passed when I received a letter from Aubonne; it was Eugénie's reply. I trembled as I opened it.

"Monsieur, you are mistaken when you think that it would not be a great deprivation to me not to have my daughter with me; I love her just as dearly as you can possibly love her. As for your son, he is yours in fact, monsieur. You know my frankness, so you can believe what I tell you. Things will remain as they are; my daughter shall not leave me. Appeal to the law if you wish; nothing will change my determination.

"EUGÉNIE."

I could hardly endure to read that letter. I was angry, furious. She had dishonored me, she had made me unhappy, and she refused to give me back my daughter! Ah! that woman had no pity, no delicacy of feeling! She loved her daughter, she said; yes, as she had loved me; she defied me, she told me to appeal to the law! Ah! if I could do it! if I had proofs of her crime to produce! But no; even if I could, she knew very well that I would not; that I did not propose that the courts should ring with my complaints, that my name should never be mentioned in society without being the subject of a jest. Yes, she knew me, and that is why she had no fear. She declared that her son was mine and she expected me to believe her word! No! I would never see that child again, I wanted never to hear his name. But my daughter—ah! I neither could nor wished to forget her.

For several days I was in a state of most intense excitement; I did not know what to do, nor what course to adopt. Sometimes I determined to go away, to leave France forever; but the thought of Henriette detained me; sometimes I determined to go back into society, to have mistresses, to pass my time with them, and to do my best to forget the past.

A profound prostration succeeded to that feverish excitement of my senses. I avoided society, I did not even go to Ernest's, although he had come several times to beg me to do so. Everything bored and tired me; I cared for nothing except to be alone, to think of my daughter. I hated and cursed her mother. Yes, I would go away, I would leave the country. What detained me there? I had no idea.

Several weeks passed, and I do not now know how I lived. I went out early in order to avoid even Ernest's visits, for I became more misanthropical, more morose every day. I walked in solitary places, I returned early, and always ordered my concierge to say that I was not at home. My concierge was my servant also now; he took care of my apartment, which was wretchedly kept.

The house in which I was living suited me in many respects; it was gloomy and dark, like most of the old houses in the Marais, and contained but few tenants, I thought, for I never met anybody on the stairs. I had one neighbor, however, with whom I would gladly have dispensed; it was a man who lived in the attic rooms above my apartment, the house having only three floors in all.

That neighbor of mine was in the habit of beginning to sing as soon as he got home, which was ordinarily between ten and eleven o'clock at night; and I was forced to listen to his jovial refrains and drinking songs until

he was in bed and asleep. It annoyed me; not because it prevented me from sleeping, for sleep never visited my eyes so early; but it disturbed me in my thoughts, in my reflections. I was inclined sometimes to complain to the concierge. But because I was unhappy, must I prevent others from being light-hearted?

For some days that music had become more unendurable than ever, because my neighbor had taken to returning much earlier, and his songs often began at eight o'clock. Although I never talked with my concierge, I decided to ask him who the man was who was always singing.

"Monsieur," the concierge replied, "he's a poor German, a tailor. I don't understand how he has the courage to sing, for he hasn't a sou, and apparently he never finds any work. That doesn't surprise me, for he is a drunkard and he works very badly. I gave him a pair of trousers, to make a coat for my son; and it was very badly made, without fit or style, and the patches all in front! I took my custom away from him. However, he won't trouble you long; as he doesn't pay his rent, the landlord has decided to give him notice."

I informed the concierge that I did not wish the man to be sent away; but it seemed that the landlord cared for nothing but his rent. That evening, about eight o'clock, I heard the tailor singing with all his lungs; he executed trills and flourishes. Who would ever have believed that the man had not a sou?

I remembered the fable of the cobbler and the banker; suppose I should go to my neighbor and give him money to keep silent? But perhaps that would make him sing all the louder; for one could find few cobblers like the one in the fable. However, I yielded to the idea of going to my neighbor. If he was an obliging

person, perhaps he would consent to sing not quite so loud. But I had little hope of it, for the Germans are obstinate and they are fond of music. Never mind, I would go to see the tailor none the less.

I ascended the stairs which separated me from the attic. My neighbor's voice guided me to his door. The key was on the outside, but for all that I knocked before opening the door.

He continued to sing a passage from *Der Freischütz*, and did not reply; thereupon I opened the door.

I entered a room in which there was a mattress with a wretched coverlid thrown over it, in one corner. A rickety chair, a few broken jars and a long board which served doubtless as a table, but which was then standing against the wall—that was all the furniture. Leaning on the sill of the window, which was open, was a man, still young, whose good-humored, bloated face was not unfamiliar to me. He was in his shirt sleeves, and was seated after the manner of tailors, with his knees outside the window, a position which made him likely to fall into the courtyard at the slightest forward movement.

On my arrival he stopped in the middle of a trill and exclaimed:

"Hello! I thought it was the concierge to ask for money again. I should have said to him: 'prout, prout!' Sit you down, monsieur."

I sat down, for my neighbor seemed quite unceremonious; he had not risen. I do not know whether he thought that I had come to hear him sing; but he seemed inclined to resume his performance. I stopped him at once.

"Monsieur, I am your neighbor."

"Indeed! you are my neighbor, are you? Beside me or below?"

"Below."

"Oh, yes! it's a fact that on this floor there's nobody but the cooks of the house, all old women, unluckily. They don't sing, they don't make love, they don't know how to make anything but sauces,—reduced consommés, as the one from the first floor says. For my part, I would give all her consommés for a bottle of beaune. Ah! how delicious beaune is! If I had any, I would give you some; but it is three days now that I haven't drunk anything but water. Prout, prout! I must make the best of it."

While the tailor was talking, I examined him, because I was confident that I had seen him somewhere before, but I could not remember where.

"Have you come to order trousers or a coat?" continued my neighbor. "It is just the right time, for I have nothing to do, and I will make 'em up for you at once, and in the latest style, although that miserable concierge presumed to complain of my skill. The idiot! he wanted me to make a new coat for his son out of an old pair of breeches that had already been turned three times."

"I have not come for a coat or a waistcoat, but to make a request of you."

"A request?"

"You sing a great deal, monsieur."

"Parbleu! I have nothing else to do."

"You sing very well, certainly."

"Yes, I have some voice; we Germans are all musicians; it is born in us."

"I know it; but do you think that for a person who works with his brain, who is obliged to think, to reflect, it is very pleasant to hear someone singing all the time?"

"What has all that got to do with me?"

"Look you, monsieur, I will come to the point; your singing inconveniences and annoys me; and if you would

be obliging enough to sing less, or not so loud, I would beg you to take this as a slight token of my gratitude."

I had taken my purse from my pocket and I was looking about for something to put it on, which was hard to find, unless I should put it on the floor, when the tailor, who had abruptly left the window and begun to dance about the room, strode toward me with a frown.

"I say, monsieur from below, who don't like music, do I look to you like a man who asks alms? Who gave you leave to come to my room and insult me? Has Pettermann ever been called a beggar?"

"Pettermann!" I said, looking at him more carefully; "is your name Pettermann?"

"Schnick Pettermann, journeyman tailor from the age of fifteen. I have never succeeded in getting to be a master tailor. It isn't my fault. Well, when will you finish staring me out of countenance?"

"Yes, I know now; you used to live on Rue Meslay."

"I think so, but I have moved so often that I can hardly remember all the rooms that I have occupied!"

"Don't you remember that little room that you used to climb into so often through the window in the roof, after breaking the glass, because you had lost your key?"

"Ah! I remember now; there was a broad gutter; it was very convenient, I used to walk on it."

"And that young neighbor of yours in whose room you used to light your candle?"

"Little Marguerite—ah, yes! I recognize you now. You were my neighbor's lover."

"Oh, no! I was only her friend; but I used to go there often, and we used to hear you come in. Ah! how happy I was in those days!"

"You were happy when I broke the window? Did that amuse you?"

"It seems that I must always happen on something to remind me of that time, although I try to avoid it. However, I am glad to see you."

"You are very good, monsieur. That must be at least five years ago, more than five years, in fact, and I wasn't married then."

"Ah! have you been married since?"

"Mon Dieu! don't mention it! I don't know what crazy idea came into my head, I who never gave a thought to love, when one day—prout, prout!—it took me like a longing to sneeze; I fancied that I was in love with a young cook who had sometimes asked me the time, then for a light; in short, trifling things which indicated a purpose to scrape an acquaintance. Suzanne was very pretty; yes, she was a superb creature, well put together; I will do justice to her physical charms. She had saved twelve hundred francs by cheating her employers a little in vegetables and butter. I said to myself: 'That will be enough to set up a nice little tailor's shop, after the style of the Palais-Royal.' I offered my hand which she accepted, and we were married; I hired a shop on Boulevard du Pont-aux-Choux, all went well for——"

"For several months?"

"Prout! you are very polite! For a few days, a week at most. After that my wife complained that I was slow, that I talked too much, that I drank. For my part, I claimed that she ought to do nothing but make buttonholes. She refused to take hold of the buttonholes, and that made me mad; I persisted, she was obstinate, and to make a long story short, we fought! oh! we fought like prize fighters! and once we had got into the habit of it, it was all over, we never missed a single day. Prout! prout! morning and night! you should have seen how we hammered each other!"

"Wouldn't it have been better to leave your wife?"

"To be sure it would, and that is what I said to myself; one night when my wife had almost torn off my left ear, I packed up my clothes and I left her."

"Have you seen her since?"

"I'm not such a fool. I have no desire to see her again, and for her part I fancy that she isn't anxious to see me. It's all over now! To the devil with love! Whether my wife dies or not, it's all one to me; I shall never marry again."

"You have no children?"

"What do you suppose? As if we had time for that when we were always fighting! And faith, I am glad that we hadn't any; they would have been left on my hands and I should have had to support the brats; and that would be hard for a man who cannot feed himself every day."

"But your wife was faithful to you, at all events?"

"Faithful? the devil! as if I paid any attention to that! In fact we only lived together four months, and that didn't make me rich! For some time past I haven't had any work at all, and a man's fingers get stiff doing nothing. But for all that, there's no reason why you should come here with your purse in your hand!"

"Look you, Monsieur Pettermann, I have not made myself understood; I had no intention of insulting you."

"I am not insulted, but——"

"I was told that you were without work, and I simply proposed to give you my custom."

"Oh! that makes a difference! your custom, that's all right."

"I can't show you to-night what I want you to do; but I thought that there would be no harm in offering you a little money in advance on what you do for me. We

have lived under the same roof before, and we know each other; I should be very sorry to fall out with you."

"Monsieur, if you offer me that in advance for the clothes I may make for you, that's a very different thing. Give me what you choose; I will take it and I will not charge you any more on account of it."

"All right; here is forty francs; we will settle up later."

"Forty francs; I will make you a nice coat and waist-coat and trousers for that. And as for singing, if it disturbs you——"

"No, sing on, Pettermann, sing on; now that I know that it's you, it won't annoy me any more; I shall imagine that I am still living in my old apartment."

I left the tailor, who could not make up his mind which pocket to put his forty francs in, and I returned to my room. But neither that night, nor during the next week, did I hear Pettermann sing, because he did not come home until midnight, and because he was always drunk and went to sleep as soon as he was in bed.

XVIII

A MEETING.—DEPARTURE

My conversation with the tailor had quieted my thoughts; they were a little less black, and I slept better; when we become depressed, we shun all sorts of diversion, we avoid our friends, whose presence would eventually allay our suffering. At such times we ought to be treated like those invalids who are forced to take decoctions

which they refuse to take, but which are essential to their cure.

One morning I went to see Ernest, who had been to my rooms at least ten times without finding me.

His wife scolded me warmly for my behavior.

"You avoid your true friends," she said to me; "you live like a wolf! that is perfectly absurd. Ought you to punish us for other people's faults? Your wife has chosen to keep her daughter—is that any reason for you to despair? Can you not go to see her?"

"Go to see her! oh! I have longed to do it a thousand times; but she is with her mother; and I could not bear the sight of her."

"Her mother is not always with her," said Ernest; "when she comes to Paris, and that has happened quite often lately, she rarely brings her daughter with her."

"What! Eugénie has come to Paris already? I did not believe that she would dare to show herself here."

"You must remember that in society you are the one who is blamed. It is you who have abandoned a lovely wife, whom you made wretched. I report exactly what people say; it does not make you angry, does it?"

"On the contrary, I am very glad to hear it. Go on, Ernest; tell me what you have learned."

"After passing only a fortnight in the country, your wife returned to Paris. She hired a handsome apartment on Rue d'Antin. She has been going into society and has indulged in amusements of all sorts. She dresses with the greatest elegance; she is seen at the theatre, at balls, and at concerts. However, she returns often to the country, passes a few days there, and then comes back here. The night before last I saw her at Madame de Saint-Albin's reception."

"You saw her?"

"Yes; there were a great many people there. When I arrived, she was at a card table. She was talking very loud, and laughing; attracted by her loud voice, I walked in that direction. When she caught sight of me, my eyes were fixed upon her; she turned hers away, and a great change came over her face; her brow darkened, she stopped talking, and soon left the table."

"Did you speak to her?"

"No, I had no wish to; and for her part I think that she was no more anxious than I, for she carefully avoided meeting my eyes. She went away while I was still looking for her in the salon; I believe that my presence was the cause of her going."

"Were not you at this reception, madame?" I asked Madame Ernest.

"Oh, no, Monsieur Henri! you know that people do not invite me; I am not married."

It seemed to me that as she said this the little woman sighed and glanced furtively at Ernest. After a moment she continued:

"However, if I were married, I should not care any more about going into society! The little that I have seen of it has not made me love it."

"My dear love," said Ernest, "we should go into society as we go to the theatre, not to please others but to enjoy ourselves; when the play is tiresome, you are not compelled to stay to the end."

"And Monsieur Dulac?" I said after a moment; "you have not mentioned him, Ernest. Don't be afraid to tell me what you know. I suppose that he is more devoted than ever to Madame Blémont."

"You are mistaken; he had no sooner recovered from his wound, and that was not long ago, than he went on a journey; I am told that he has gone to Italy."

I confess that that news pleased me. And yet what did it matter to me now whether it was Dulac or some other man who was attentive to Madame Blémont, as I should have nothing more in common with that woman? Madame Blémont! She still called herself so, Ernest assured me. I hoped that she would have resumed her mother's name. Was it not cruel to be unable to take one's name away from a woman who dishonored it? If Madame Blémont should have other children, they too would bear my name and would share my property. Was that justice? But divorce was prohibited, because it was considered immoral! Oh! of course it is much more moral to leave to a guilty wife the name of the husband whom she abandons, and to strange children a title and property to which they have no right!

And Ernest insisted that I should return to that circle where Madame Blémont was welcomed and made much of; whereas they would consider that they compromised themselves by inviting dear little Marguerite, who loved her children, devoted herself to her family and made Ernest happy; and why? because she was not married. Oh! that society, overflowing with vices and absurd prejudices, disgusted me! I left it to Madame Blémont; I did not propose to share anything with her thenceforth.

I promised my friends to go often to see them. I had not yet made up my mind what I would do; but I still intended to travel, to leave Paris, especially since I knew that Madame Blémont had returned.

My concierge informed me that a gentleman had called to see me for the third time. From the description that he gave me I could not doubt that it was Bélan, and I ordered the man always to tell him that I was out. He also handed me a card upon which was the name of Giraud. Would those people never leave me to myself?

Unluckily my business had made it necessary for me to leave my address at my former apartment; but I determined to settle all the cases which had been placed in my hands with all possible speed, in order that I might leave Paris as soon as possible.

I spent a part of every day going about to my former clients, to whom I restored their papers, on the pretext that my health compelled me to abandon my profession. In my peregrinations I occasionally saw Bélan or Giraud, but I always succeeded in avoiding them. I had just finished my last business. I felt free once more, and was congratulating myself upon being able to follow my inclinations, when, as I walked rapidly through the Palais-Royal, I was stopped by Bélan. That time I had no opportunity to avoid him.

"Ah! I have caught you at last! Upon my word, I am in luck; where in the devil have you been hiding, my dear friend? I have been to your apartment a great many times, but you are always out."

"I have many matters to arrange, my dear Bélan, and at this moment I am in a great hurry."

"I don't care for that, I don't propose to let you go; I have too many things to tell you. But I say, have you left your wife?"

"Yes, we could not agree."

"That is what I said at once: 'They did not agree.' I admit that you are generally blamed; you are looked upon as a jealous husband, a domestic tyrant."

"People may say what they choose; it is quite indifferent to me."

"And you are right. As for myself, if I only could separate from my mother-in-law! Great heaven! how happy I would be! But Armide refuses to leave her mother, and the result is that I am constantly between two

fires: when one is not picking a quarrel with me, the other is. To be sure, I am perfectly at ease now concerning my wife's fidelity. The marquis no longer comes to see us; I don't know why, but he has entirely ceased his visits. As for Armide, she has become so crabbed, so sour; *mon Dieu!* there are times when I think that I should prefer to be a cuckold, and to have my wife amiable; and yet——"

"Bélan, I am obliged to leave you."

"Pshaw! what's your hurry? You are very lucky now, you are living as a bachelor again; you are raising the deuce——"

"I am giving my whole attention to settling up my business, and——"

"Oh, yes! playing the saint! I know you, you rake! faith! between ourselves, I will tell you that I too have made a little acquaintance. Look you, we men are not saints, and although one is married, one may have weaknesses, moments of forgetfulness; indeed, that is quite legitimate for us. But I have to take the greatest precautions, for if my wife or my mother-in-law should surprise me——"

"Adieu, Bélan. I wish you all the pleasure in the world."

"But where are you going so fast? I will go with you."

I was not at all anxious for the little man's company; and to get rid of him, I told him that I was going to the Bois de Boulogne. He clapped his hands and cried:

"Parbleu! how nicely it happens! That is just where I have arranged to meet my little one—near the Château de Madrid. I never see her except outside the barrier."

"But I have business in another direction."

"Never mind; we will take a cab and drive to the Bois together."

I could not refuse; it mattered little to me after all whether I went to the Bois; I had plenty of time. And once there, I knew how to rid myself of Bélan.

We took a cab. On the way Bélan talked to me about his wife, his mistress, his mother-in-law, and my duel with Dulac; which he believed to be the result of our quarrel over the cards. I was careful not to undeceive him.

When we arrived at the Bois, Bélan insisted that I should go with him and be introduced to his acquaintance. I assured him that somebody was waiting for me too; but to satisfy him I agreed to meet him two hours later at the Porte Maillot; and I determined not to be there.

Bélan left me at last, and I entered a path opposite to that which he had taken. The weather was fine; it was four o'clock and there were many people, especially equestrians, in the Bois. I stood for several minutes watching the young people who came there to display their costumes and horses, and their skill in riding. There had been a time when I myself enjoyed that pleasure; but now nothing of the sort had any temptation for me.

A cloud of dust announced the approach of a party. I thought that I could see two women among the riders, and I stopped to look at them. The cavalcade came up at a gallop and passed close to me. Having glanced at one of the ladies, I turned my eyes upon the other. It was Eugénie,—Eugénie, dressed in a stylish riding habit, and riding gracefully a spirited horse. She almost brushed against me, her horse covered me with dust and I was utterly unable to step back. I stood there, so startled, so oppressed, that I had not the strength to walk.

The cavalcade was already far away, and my eyes were still following it; I stood in the same spot, benumbed, motionless, with no eyes for anything else. Other horsemen came up at a fast gallop. I did not hear them. They called to me: "Look out!" but I did not stir. Suddenly I felt a violent shock; I was thrown down upon the gravel, and a horse's hoof struck me in the head.

My eyes closed and I lost consciousness. When I came to myself, I found myself in one of the cafés at the entrance to the Bois. I saw many people about me; among others, several young swells. One of them said to me:

"I am terribly distressed, monsieur; I am the cause of your accident. I shouted to you, however; but my horse had too much impetus, and I could not stop him."

"Yes, that is true," observed a man who was holding my head; "I can testify that monsieur shouted: 'Look out!' but why should anyone ride like the wind? I shouted to you: 'Stop!' but prout! you didn't stop."

I recognized Pettermann; it was he who was behind me. I accepted the apology of the young cavalier and told him that I bore him no ill will. I reassured him concerning my wound, although I felt very weak, for I had lost much blood. Someone had sent for a carriage and I asked Pettermann if he could go with me.

"What's that? can I!" replied the tailor; "why, if I couldn't, I'd go with you all the same. As if I would leave in this condition an excellent neighbor of mine who paid me forty francs in advance! Prout! you don't know me!"

They bandaged my head and helped me into the cab. Pettermann seated himself opposite me and we returned to Paris.

On the way, my wound occupied my attention much less than the meeting I had had. I asked Pettermann if he had not seen a woman riding past me when they took me up and carried me away.

"When you were thrown down," said the tailor, "I was within thirty yards of you. I was walking, loafing, I had nothing to do. However, I did go to your room this morning, monsieur, to ask you for your cloth; but I never find you in the morning and at night I can't find your door."

"That isn't what I asked you."

"True. Well, then, I was walking, and I had just noticed some ladies pass on horseback. Prout! but they rode finely! Other horses came along and I stepped to one side; and it was then that I saw you. They shouted: 'Look out!' I don't know what you were looking at, but you didn't move; and yet I said to myself: 'That gentleman isn't deaf, for he heard me sing well enough.' Still the horses came on. I shouted 'Look out!' to you myself, and I sung out to the riders to stop; but prout! you were already on the ground, and with a famous scar! The young men stopped then. I already had you in my arms. The man who knocked you down was in despair, I must do him justice. We carried you to the nearest café; and when I said that I was your neighbor and that I knew you, they sent for a cab; and then you opened your eyes. But never mind! you got a rousing kick!"

"And while I was unconscious, you saw no other people near me? Those ladies on horseback—did not one of them come back?"

"No, monsieur; there was no other lady near you except the one that keeps the café; but she washed your head; oh! she didn't spare the water!"

I said no more. I was beginning to suffer terribly; the carriage made me sick, my head was on fire and my brain in a whirl. At last we reached my home. Pettermann and the concierge carried me upstairs, put me to bed, and went to call a doctor. I had a violent fever; soon I was unable to reply to the people about me; I did not know them.

One evening I opened my heavy eyes and glanced about my room. It was dimly lighted by a lamp. I saw Pettermann sitting at a table, with his head resting on one of his hands, and his eyes fastened upon a watch which he held in the other. I called him feebly; he heard me, uttered a joyful cry, dropped the watch, and ran to my bed.

"Ah! you are saved!" he cried as he embraced me. "The doctor said that you would recover consciousness to-night, before nine o'clock. I was counting the minutes; there are only five left and I was beginning to doubt the doctor's word. But you recognize me! *Sacredi!* you are saved!"

He embraced me again, and I felt tears upon my cheeks. So there were still some people who loved me! That thought relieved me. I held out my hand to that excellent man, pressed his hand, and motioned to him to sit down beside me.

"First of all," he said to me, "you are going to drink this; it's some medicine ordered by the doctor, and you must do what he orders, since he has cured you. I believe in doctors now."

I drank the potion; then Pettermann picked up the watch and put it to his ear, saying:

"It was your watch that I dropped on the floor, monsieur; but it hasn't even stopped. It's like you, the spring is strong."

He sat down and continued:

"For five days now you've been there in bed, and in that time fever and delirium have been playing a fine game with you! Your brain galloped like the infernal horse that knocked you down. We tried in vain to calm you; you called me Eugénie, you talked about nothing but Eugénie. Sometimes you adored her, and the next minute you cursed her; so that the concierge, who is a bit of a gossip, said that some woman named Eugénie must have been playing tricks on you; and I replied: 'You must see that monsieur is delirious, and consequently he doesn't know what he is saying.' In short, I don't know whether I did right, monsieur, but seeing you in that condition, and no one with you to nurse you, I stationed myself here and I haven't budged. The concierge undertook to object, he wanted his niece, who is nine years old, to nurse you; but prout! I didn't listen to him, and I said: 'I was the one who brought monsieur home wounded, and I won't leave him until he's cured.' If I did wrong, I ask your pardon, and I will go away."

I offered my hand to Pettermann again.

"Far from doing wrong, my friend, it is I who am deeply indebted to you."

"Not at all, monsieur, I owe you forty francs. But as soon as you get your cloth——"

"Let's not talk about that."

"All right; besides, you mustn't talk much, that's another of the doctor's orders."

"Has anyone been to see me?"

"Not a cat has entered the room except the doctor and the concierge."

Ernest and his wife could know nothing of my accident; otherwise I was sure that they would have come to take care of me. So henceforth I could have only

strangers about me. Ah! if my mother had known—but I was very glad that she had not been informed of the accident, which would have frightened her. There were many other things too which she did not know and which I would have been glad to conceal from her forever.

I tried to rest, but Eugénie's image often disturbed my sleep.

It was she who was the cause of my being in that bed. It was impossible that she should not have recognized me, for her horse passed close to me; and she did not return! Had she heard the commotion caused by my accident? That I did not know. While I shunned society as if I were guilty, Eugénie was indulging in all forms of pleasure. She, who used to mount a horse only in fear and trepidation, and to ride very quietly, now rode through the Bois de Boulogne at a fast gallop and displayed the rash courage of an experienced horseman! It still seemed to me that I was dreaming, that I was delirious. Since the Eugénie of the old days no longer existed, it seemed to me I must forget the new one, I must think no more of the woman who had wrecked my life.

I believed that, if I could embrace my little Henriette, I should be entirely cured at once. I determined to go to see her before leaving Paris, and to take her in my arms without her mother's knowledge; and even if her mother should know it, had I not the right to kiss my daughter? I would be patient until then.

The doctor came again to see me. He was a man whom I did not know; he seemed abrupt and cold; he talked little, but he neither made a show of his knowledge nor used long words to his patients. I like doctors of that sort.

After a few days I was much better, and I began to recover my strength. Pettermann was still in my room; he had told me to dismiss him as soon as he annoyed me, and I had kept him. I had become accustomed to his services and attentions. I could not doubt his attachment, for he had given me proofs of it. One especially convincing proof was that he had not drunk too much a single time since he had constituted himself my nurse. It was not selfish interest that guided him, for by refusing my purse when I went up to his room he had proved that he did not care for money. I had noticed also that he was neither prying nor talkative.

I indulged in all these reflections one evening as I lay upon a couch. Pettermann was seated by the window; he said nothing, for he never tried to converse when I did not speak to him. Sometimes we passed several hours in succession without a word; that was another quality which I liked in him.

"Pettermann."

"Monsieur."

"Are you very much attached to your tailor's trade?"

"Faith, monsieur, I have had so little work lately that I shall end by forgetting my trade. And then, I may as well admit that I have never been able to distinguish myself at it, and I am sick of it!"

"As soon as I have fully recovered my strength, I propose to leave Paris and travel, for a very long time perhaps. If I should suggest to you to go with me, to remain with me, not as a servant, but as a confidential friend and trusted companion, how would that suit you?"

"Suit me! prout! that would suit me completely, monsieur. I will be your groom, your valet, whatever you choose; for I am sure that you will never treat me in a way to humiliate me."

"Of course not. But, Pettermann, you have one failing——"

"I know what you mean; I get drunk. That is true; but it never happened to me except when I had nothing to do. You will keep me busy, and that will correct my habit of drinking. However, I don't mean to swear to give up wine entirely, for I should break my oath. If you take me with you, you must allow me to get drunk once a month. I ask only that."

"Once a month, all right; but no more!"

"No, monsieur."

"It's a bargain! You will stay with me. You have nothing to keep you in Paris?"

"Bless my soul, no, monsieur; I have nothing but my wife."

"We start in a few days; but I warn you that I intend to travel like an artist, sometimes on foot, sometimes in a carriage; to defy the rain and the sun when that is my pleasure."

"Monsieur is joking. I am not a dainty woman; I will do whatever you do."

"One word more: do you know my name?"

"I have heard the concierge mention it once; I don't remember it, but——"

"Don't try to remember it. I mean to assume another under which I intend to travel. I shall call myself after this, Dalbreuse, and I do not wish to be called anything else."

"That is enough, monsieur; you understand that I will call you whatever you please. So I have a profession at last. I have no further need to try to get waistcoats and breeches to make! The deuce take sewing! And then too I am very glad not to have to leave monsieur."

Pettermann's delight pleased me. I was very glad to have someone in my service who had not known me during my married life.

On the day following this agreement, Ernest entered my room, ran to me and embraced me.

"Do you know that I have been near death?" I asked him.

"I have just learned it from your concierge. Ungrateful man! not to send us any word! Is that the way that a man should treat his friends?"

"My dear Ernest, when I was in condition to send you word, I was out of danger; then I preferred to wait until I was entirely well, in order that I might come and tell you myself."

"But what was this accident that happened to you?"

I told Ernest the whole story; I did not conceal from him that I was knocked down because I had gazed too long after Eugénie. Ernest was indignant at my weakness, and he started to scold me.

"My friend," I said, "you will have no further cause for such reproaches; to prove it, I refuse from this instant to hear my wife mentioned. You will promise never to mention her name again, will you not?"

"Oh! I shall not be the one to break that promise!"

"Besides, I am going to leave you, for a long time perhaps. I am going to travel."

"Despite my grief at being separated from you, I can only approve this plan. Change of scene will do you good. But are you going alone?"

"No, I have found a faithful companion; that man who left the room when you came in. You did not recognize him, did you? It is that poor journeyman tailor who lived in the attic room near your dear Marguerite, and who used to get into his room by breaking the window."

“Is it possible? And that man——”

“Did not leave me for one minute while my life was in danger. And yet I was a mere stranger to him. He is to travel with me, he will go wherever I go.”

“I am very glad to know that you will have some devoted friend with you.”

“Here, my friend, take this memorandum book.”

“What shall I do with it?”

“It contains the portrait of the woman whom I used to call my wife. I must not keep it any longer. Later, if you choose, you may give the book to—to her son.”

“Her son? But, Blémont, he is your son too. Are you not going to see him before you go away?”

“No, the sight of him is too painful to me. I have told you all that I thought,—all my torments. I shall never see that child again.”

“My dear Blémont, are you not wrong? Is that child responsible for his mother’s wrongdoing?”

“It is possible that I am unjust; why did she give me a right to be? I entrust you to look after everything that concerns him, and to put him at school when he reaches the proper age. I will give you a letter to my notary, instructing him to supply you with money whenever you need it. Forgive me, my friend, for all the trouble I cause you.”

“Do not speak of trouble. But consider that that child——”

“Not another word about him, I beg you. I propose to try to banish from my memory those persons whom I am forced to banish from my heart. By the way, you must cease to call me Blémont, too; from this moment I lay aside that name and assume the name of Dalbreuse. So that is the name under which you must write to me, Ernest; for I trust that you will write to me, my friend.”

"Yes, to be sure; but I trust that you will not stay away from us a century. There will come a time, my dear Henri, when you will be able to live in Paris and to meet the—the person whom you avoid now, without its producing too serious an effect upon you."

"I hope so. Meanwhile, I shall go away; I propose to visit Switzerland, the Alps, the Pyrenees, Italy—no, I shall not go to Italy. But I shall stop wherever I find that I enjoy myself. I shall try to paint some lovely views, some attractive landscapes."

"Above all things, paint some portraits of beautiful women; they will distract you better than anything else. But when are you going? You must wait until you are perfectly well."

"I flatter myself that in a week I shall not feel my wound; meantime, you will see me often; I am to be allowed to go out to-morrow, and I will go to your house."

Ernest took his leave and I made arrangements for my journey. Ernest would let my apartment all furnished during my absence, and I left him in full charge of everything. I had but one wish, that was to be far away from Paris; but first I absolutely must see and embrace my daughter.

At last I was able to leave my room. I purchased two horses, for I proposed to travel by short stages as long as it amused me. Then I went to see my mother; I trembled lest she should have learned that I was no longer living with my wife. She did know it, in fact; some kind friends had not failed to inform her that I had separated from Eugénie; but she thought that it was nothing more than a quarrel which had caused the rupture. She proposed her mediation to reconcile us, for she also believed that it was I who was in the wrong; and she preached me a sermon.

I thanked my mother and told her of my approaching departure, which I said was due to important business. She hoped that at my return everything would be forgotten between my wife and myself; I encouraged her in that hope and bade her adieu. I was very certain that she would not go to see my wife, for that would disturb her habits.

I gave to Ernest and his companion all the time that remained before my departure. They were sorry to lose me, and yet they were glad that I was going; it was the same with myself. I urged them to send me news of my daughter; in leaving her I was separating from a part of myself, but if I remained I should not see her any more. I made them swear that when they wrote to me they would never mention Madame Blémont. Finally, one night I embraced Ernest and Marguerite and their children affectionately; I was to start early next morning.

Pettermann had long been ready. He told me that he was an excellent rider. We had a good horse each, and at six o'clock we left Paris. My comrade was very glad to be on the road; he hummed a refrain from the *Mariage de Figaro*, which he had not done since my illness.

I started in the direction of Montmorency, for Aubonne is in that neighborhood, and I proposed to go there to see my daughter. During the past few days I had made inquiries concerning Madame Blémont at her house on Rue d'Antin. In Paris, by the use of money, one may learn whatever one desires. The result of my inquiries was that Madame Blémont was now at Paris, and that her daughter was not with her. So that Henriette was in the country without her mother; I could not hope to find a more favorable moment to see my daughter.

We rode through Montmorency and arrived at Aubonne. Pettermann rode behind without once asking

where we were going, and his discretion gratified me. When we came in sight of the first houses of Aubonne, I said to him:

"I have business here, Pettermann; I have to see someone who is very dear to me."

"Whatever you please, monsieur; it looks to be a pleasant place."

"First of all, you must inquire where Madame Rennebaut lives; she is an old lady who owns a house in this neighborhood."

"Madame Rennebaut? All right; I will ask the first baker that I see. Perhaps there's only one in the village, and Madame Rennebaut must necessarily trade with him. Wait here for me, monsieur, I will soon be back."

I let Pettermann go; I was then on the summit of a hill from which I could see several country houses nearby; I had stopped my horse and my eyes strove to look inside those houses, to find my Henriette; the hope that I should soon see and embrace my child made my heart beat faster.

Pettermann returned.

"Monsieur, I have found out about Madame Rennebaut: she is an old widow lady, very rich and with no children, who keeps a gardener, a cook and a maid."

"And her house?"

"It is at the other end of the village; if we take this road to the pond, then turn to the left, we shall see the house in front of us. It is a fine house with an iron fence in front of it, and a garden with a terrace, from which there is a splendid view."

"Let us go on, Pettermann."

We followed the road that had been pointed out to him. As I knew that Madame Blémont was at Paris, I had no hesitation about calling at Madame Rennebaut's house; I did not know what Eugénie might have told her, but I

would ask to see my daughter, and I could not believe that they would deny me that satisfaction.

We had passed the pond and were on a sort of path with the fields on one side, leading to the lovely valley of Montmorency.

I spied the house that had been described to us; I urged my horse, and we were already skirting the garden wall, when I saw a woman walking on the terrace which ran along the wall on that side, leading a little girl by the hand.

I recognized the woman and the little girl at once; and, instantly turning my horse about, I rode into the fields and away from the house as rapidly as we had approached.

I did not stop until several clumps of trees concealed me from the house. Eugénie was there; therefore my informant must have been misled, or perhaps she had returned the night before. However that might be, she was there and I could not go to that house; her presence debarred me; perhaps she would think it was she whom I wished to see. I should be too humiliated if she should have such a thought.

However, I did not wish to go away without embracing my daughter. I did not know what to do. Pettermann had followed me closely, and was right behind me; but he waited and said nothing. I dismounted, and he was about to do the same.

"No," I said, "remain in the saddle and hold my horse; we shall go away again soon. Wait for me behind these trees."

I left him and walked toward the house, taking a roundabout way in order to avoid being seen by the persons on the terrace; I was certain that they had not seen me before, for they were not looking in my direction. At last I reached the garden where I had seen them; a

hedge concealed me. I saw the edge of the terrace, but I could not look into the garden. There was a walnut tree within a few feet of me; I looked about to see if anyone was observing me, and in a few seconds I was in the tree. From there I could look into the garden easily and had no fear of being seen.

There they were; they were coming in my direction from a path where they had been out of my sight. Henriette ran about playing. Her mother walked slowly, her eyes often on the ground, or gazing listlessly about. Ah! how much lovelier than ever my daughter appeared to me! How happy I was when she turned her head in my direction!

They drew near. The mother sat down on a bench near the corner of the wall. She had a book, but she placed it by her side and did not read. Why did she not read? Of what was she thinking? She did not talk with her daughter; her brow was careworn and her eyes were heavy. Was she already weary of dissipation?

Henriette ran to her and offered her some flowers which she had just plucked. She took her daughter between her knees, gazed at her, and suddenly kissed her several times in a sort of frenzy, then released her and relapsed into a reverie.

Never had she embraced her daughter like that in my presence; was it that she was afraid of pleasing me by allowing me to witness the caresses which she bestowed upon our child?

Nearly an hour passed. She was still there, sitting on the bench, not reading, from time to time glancing at her daughter, who was playing on the terrace. And I gave no thought to the passing of time, to poor Pettermann who was waiting for me; I could not turn my eyes away from that garden.

Suddenly, as she ran toward her mother, Henriette made a false step and fell on her face. I uttered a cry simultaneously with Eugénie. She ran to the child, lifted her up and kissed her; the little one cried a little, but soon became calm and smiled, and I heard her say:

“It isn’t anything, mamma.”

Thereupon Eugénie looked about in every direction. Still holding her daughter in her arms, she walked to the edge of the terrace and looked out upon the road. I heard her say to her daughter:

“It wasn’t you who cried when you fell, was it?”

“No, mamma.”

“Who was it then?”

“I don’t know, mamma.”

“Is your nurse in the garden?”

“I don’t know.”

“But no; it wasn’t the nurse who cried out in that way.”

Her eyes were still searching; she looked in every direction, and I dared not stir; I was afraid to move a leaf; but in a moment she said:

“Let us go in, Henriette.”

“I’d rather stay in the garden.”

“But if you should fall again——”

“No, I won’t run any more; I will play quietly.”

She walked away, and my daughter remained behind. I wondered if I might take advantage of that moment. But the wall was rather high; how could I get to her? Ah! by mounting my horse, I could do it perhaps.

I climbed down from my tree, and ran back to Pettermann, who was still in the saddle; I mounted my horse and motioned to my companion to follow me. In a moment I was beside the garden wall again. I stood on my horse, reached the top of the wall, jumped, and in

a moment was on the terrace, leaving Pettermann staring at me with amazement, but without uttering a word.

I walked a few steps into the garden; I saw my daughter, I ran to her, took her in my arms and covered her with kisses before she had time to recognize me; at last she was able to look at me and she cried joyfully:

"It is papa! my little papa! you have come back, haven't you? I keep asking mamma every day if you are coming back."

"Hush, hush, my child; come this way, on the terrace; I don't want to be seen from the house."

"Wait; I will go and call mamma."

"No, no; don't go; stay with me, don't leave me; it is so long since I have kissed you, dear child! Do you think of me sometimes?"

"Oh! yes, papa, I longed so for you."

"You longed to see me? And your mother, what does she say when you ask her about me?"

"She doesn't say anything; she just says: 'That will do; don't mention your papa.'"

"She doesn't want you to think of me, she wants you to forget me!"

"And yet she talks about you all day."

"Your mother?"

"Let me go and tell mamma that you are here."

"No, my dear love, I haven't time to speak to her now. I must leave you too, for a very long time perhaps."

"What? are you going away again? Oh! stay with us, papa, don't go away!"

Poor child! I should have been so glad to stay with her. I sat down on the bench where her mother had sat just before, I took her in my lap and threw my arms about her. For a moment I had an idea of taking her with me, of stealing her from Eugénie; but the dear child could

not travel with me, and perhaps she would cry for her mother every day in my arms; for a child can do without her father much better than without her who gave birth to her. No, I must leave her with her mother; it was much better that I should be the one to suffer and to be unhappy.

These reflections made my heart ache; I sighed as I held my little Henriette in my arms; she gazed at me, and, seeing that I was sad, she dared not smile. Poor child! and I had thought of taking you with me! No, in my arms you would too often lose that lightness of heart which is the only treasure of your age.

Suddenly I heard a voice calling:

“Henriette, Henriette, aren’t you coming?”

“Here I am, mamma,” cried the child. I sprang to my feet, placed her on the ground, kissed her several times, and ran away.

“Why, papa, wait, here comes mamma.”

Those words gave me wings; I reached the wall, I dropped on the other side, then I ran to Pettermann, leaped on my horse, and shouted:

“Gallop! gallop!”

We both urged our horses and were already far away from Aubonne before I dared to turn, for fear of seeing her on the terrace.

XIX

MONT-D'OR

Two years had passed since I left Paris. Accompanied by my faithful Pettermann, I had travelled all over Spain; the memory of Gil Blas made my sojourn there more delightful; I looked for him at the inns, and on the public promenades; and more than once, when a beggar threw his hat at my feet, I looked to see if he were not taking aim at me with a carbine. The scullery maids and the mule drivers reminded me also of Don Quixote and his facetious squire; I would have liked to meet them riding in search of adventures. All honor to the poets who depict their heroes so vividly that one becomes convinced that they have really existed. Gil Blas and Don Quixote are only imaginary characters, and yet we sometimes fancy that we recognize them; we look for them in the country where the author has placed them. They must be very lifelike therefore, those pages of the novelist, since we attribute life to them, and they become engraved in our memories. For my own part, I know that it would be impossible for me to visit the mountains of Scotland without recalling Rob Roy; to visit Mauritius, without talking of Paul and Virginia; and to visit Italy without thinking of Corinne.

I crossed the Pyrenees, but the idea of seeing Switzerland occurred to me, and we left France again. My depression had vanished, I was no longer morose and taciturn as when I left home; Pettermann too had resumed

his habit of singing. We had travelled on horseback for some time; then I sold our steeds and we went through a large part of Andalusia on foot; after that, public conveyances or hired post-chaises carried us to other places. It was by diversifying thus our random journeyings, that I triumphed over the trouble that was consuming me; and it was not an easy matter. In truth, there was still a tinge of bitterness in my smile, and I concluded that that was something of which I could never rid myself.

In the different countries I had visited, I had seen many husbands who were in my position and who worried little about it. Some, jealous through self-esteem, were themselves unfaithful and tyrannized over their wives; others, pretending to be philosophical, treated very badly in private the wives whom in society they seemed to leave entirely at liberty. Many of them closed their eyes, and the great majority believed themselves too shrewd to be betrayed. But I had seen very few who really loved their wives, and who deserved by their attentions and their conduct that those ladies should be true to them.

I had had some love-affairs, but I had not lost my heart. I believed it to be no longer susceptible to love; it had been too cruelly lacerated. My heart was like an invalid with whom I was travelling; it was still weak, and it dreaded violent emotions.

Pettermann gave little thought to the other sex, and I was very glad of it for his sake; but he did not forget the promise I had given him, and he got completely drunk once every month. The rest of the time he drank moderately. I had had no reason to complain of him since he had entered my service. His disposition was equable and cheerful; he sang when he saw that I was

in good humor, he held his peace when I was pensive. But never a question, never an inquisitive word; he did not once mention Aubonne, where he had seen me scale the wall. I had every reason to think that he believed me a bachelor.

During the first year of my absence, I received letters from Ernest quite frequently, and I wrote to him whenever I sojourned for any length of time in one place. Faithful to the promise he had given me, he had abstained from mentioning her whom I hoped to forget entirely. He wrote me about my daughter and little Eugène; he said that my Henriette was as fascinating as ever; he had seen her several times. Did that mean that he had been to her mother's house? That was something that I did not know. Ah! how I longed to see my daughter again, and to embrace her! It was for her that I had determined to return to Paris; I would hold her in my arms just once, and then I would set out on my travels again; I should have laid in a store of happiness which would last for some time. As for my—as for little Eugène, I could not think of that child without reviving all my suffering. I should have taken such pleasure in loving my son, in dividing my affection between him and his sister! and that happiness I was destined never to enjoy! Poor Eugène! what a melancholy future for him!

The last letters which I had received from Ernest had seemed to me different from the first ones; the style was no longer the same, and I detected embarrassment and reticence in them. In the last of all, I had noticed this sentence:

“There has been a great change here of late, my friend; you would not recognize the person from whom you fled. I dare not say more for fear of breaking my promise and

being scolded. But come back soon, my dear Henri; your children long to see you and your friends to embrace you."

My children—he persisted in saying my children. But I had only one. As for the change that he mentioned, what did it matter to me? Did he want to arouse my interest in that woman? No, I could not believe that. I did not mention the subject in my reply.

I was anxious, before returning to Paris, to see Auvergne, that mountainous and picturesque province, the Scotland of France, which those Frenchmen who rave over cliffs and glaciers and precipices would visit oftener if it were not so near them. We admire only what is at a distance; our only ambition is to see Scotland and Italy, and we do not give a thought to Auvergne, Bretagne, and Touraine.

I had visited Talende, with its lovely streams, La Roche Blanche, and the Puy-de-Dôme. Sometimes, when I was enchanted by a beautiful spot, I would turn to Pettermann and say:

"What do you think of this?"

But Pettermann was no painter; I never detected any enthusiasm on his face; he would shake his head and reply coldly:

"It is very pretty; but prout! it doesn't come up to the views in Munich."

Munich was his home. There was one man at least who honored his own country.

As we passed near Mont-d'Or, I determined to go there to taste the waters, and to see the little town to which so many invalids and sightseers resort, and, generally speaking, those people who do not know what to do with their time.

I took rooms at the best hotel in the place. I found a large number of guests there; many foreigners, especially

Englishmen, but many Frenchmen too, notably those *chevaliers d'industrie*, men with refined manners, who are seen in Paris at routs and large receptions, and who go to Mont-d'Or solely to gamble; for there is much gambling at those watering places; and often a traveller who arrives in a handsome carriage with liveried servants, goes away on foot and unattended, as a result of yielding to the passion for play.

I did not play cards; but there were also dancing and musical parties. Music no longer had any attractions for me, and the sound of a piano made me ill; I did not dance, either; so that I must needs try to pass my time in conversation. Among the visitors with whom I was thrown every day, I could not help noticing a young lady from Paris who seemed to be about twenty-five years old. She was pretty, and was too well aware of the fact, perhaps; but there was in her coquetry a flavor of frankness and amiability which seemed to say: 'I am a flirt but I can't help it; you must overlook my faults and take me as I am, for I shall never change.'

Her name was Caroline Derbin. At first I thought that she was married or a widow, for her manner and her decided tone did not suggest a *demoiselle*; she was unmarried, however; she was said to be rich and already in control of her property. Rich, pretty and still unmarried,—it was probable that it was her own choice.

She was with her uncle, one Monsieur Roquencourt; he was a little, thin man, about sixty years of age, but alert and jovial. His little eyes gleamed when he was ogling a lady. He was well-bred, gallant, and attentive to the fair sex; a little inclined to loquacity; but we may well leave liberty of speech to those who have nothing else. Moreover, he was most devoted to his niece, whose lightest wish was law to him.

Although Caroline was coquettish and tried to attract, at all events she had neither the peevishness nor the affection of a *petite-maitresse*. One became acquainted with her very quickly, and was soon on most friendly terms with her. Did that unreserve speak in favor of her virtue and her principles? That was a question that I could not answer. I had determined not to judge by appearances again. Of what account to me were her coquetry and her heedlessness? I did not propose to marry her or to make love to her. Her company pleased and amused me, and that was enough.

Monsieur Roquencourt liked to talk, and I was a good listener; a talent, or patience, which is more rare than one would think. I soon became his favorite companion.

"Monsieur Dalbreuse," he said to me on the day after my arrival at Mont-d'Or, "just fancy that I had no idea of coming here to take the waters. In the first place, I am not sick; but it occurred to my niece that she would like to see Mont-d'Or, and crac! we had to start. I remember being at Plombières thirty-five years ago, with the famous Lekain. Did you know Lekain?"

"No, monsieur."

"Of course not, you were too young. I acted in Lekain's presence the part of Crispin, in *Les Folies Amoureuses*."

"Ah! you have acted, have you?"

"Because I enjoyed it,—with amateurs. Oh! I was mad over acting. I had a complete wardrobe. I still have several costumes in Paris; I used to play the upper servants."

"And your niece?"

"My niece? oh, no! she declares that she could not act well. As I was saying, I played before Lekain; it was a party hastily arranged at a contractor's country house.

We had a pretty little theatre, on my word, and Mademoiselle Contat was there and acted with us. Did you know Mademoiselle Contat?"

"No, monsieur."

"Ah! you haven't seen anything, monsieur! Such talent! such soul! and such a face! One day—I forget what play it was in; wait, I believe that it was *Tartufe*. No, it wasn't *Tartufe*."

Monsieur Roquencourt's niece joined us at that moment, which fact I in no wise regretted. She took her uncle's arm and said:

"This is the time for our drive; the weather is superb. Come, uncle, you can talk of plays another time. Are you coming with us, Monsieur Dalbreuse?"

She asked me that as if we had known each other for years. I admit that I liked her manner; I have always been susceptible to anything which resembles sincerity or frankness; moreover, it mattered little to me then whether I was mistaken or not.

I went to drive with Monsieur Roquencourt and his niece. A pretty calèche was awaiting them at the door. I noticed that the male visitors, as they bowed to Caroline, gazed at me with an envious eye as I took my seat opposite her in the carriage. I could understand that a charming woman of twenty-five, who had her own carriage, was likely to make numerous conquests everywhere. Some were in love with the woman, and others with the carriage. But I, who coveted neither, took my seat with the utmost tranquillity opposite Mademoiselle Derbin, and enjoyed the drive at leisure, because I was not occupied in making eyes at my vis-à-vis.

At times, Mademoiselle Derbin raved over the landscape; then, all of a sudden, she would begin to laugh at the costume of a water-drinker who passed us. While

laughing at her remarks, I pretended to be listening attentively to her uncle, who described the effect he had produced playing Mascarille before Molé.

The drive seemed short to me. We returned to the hotel, and in the evening we met again in the salon. I amused myself watching Mademoiselle Derbin. In company she was more coquettish and therefore less agreeable than in private. As I was not paying court to her, I discreetly walked away when I saw a number of adorers coming her way. So that, as a result of that eccentricity which is not uncommon in women, Mademoiselle Derbin seemed to seek my company, and often came to my side.

"You do not dance?" she asked me toward the end of the evening.

"No, I no longer care for dancing."

"And you do not play cards?"

"They play for very high stakes here. I have an income which is sufficient for my needs; I do not care to endanger it with men who would consider it the most natural thing in the world to rob me of it."

"You are a wise man!"

"Oh, no!"

"And you have no love-affairs here?"

"Do you think then that one must absolutely have love-affairs when one goes to a watering-place?"

"I don't say that, but I think you are a most original person."

"Original? no, I assure you that there are many men like me."

She left me, after glancing at me with a singular expression. Did she desire to number me among her numerous conquests? It was possible; what she had just said to me might give me a poor idea of her virtue. An unmarried woman who considers it strange that a man

has no love-affairs! And yet, I preferred to think that that was simply due to her original character.

I had been a fortnight at Mont-d'Or, and I had intended to pass only one week there. But I was enjoying myself; the company was agreeable; however, if Caroline and her uncle had not been there, I should have gone away; I was becoming accustomed to their society. There was nothing to do there but converse, so that we were together almost all day. I was not making love to Caroline, but she was very pretty; her black eyes alternated in expression between gentleness and mischief. Although one be not in love, there is always a charm attached to the presence of a pretty woman; it was probably that charm which detained me.

There was not a ball or a concert in the assembly room every day; when there was none, we remained at the hotel, and those guests who were congenial met in the salon in the evening. Some played cards, but the greater number conversed. There were some titled persons, and they were not the most agreeable; but we left them to bore one another in their corner, and we chatted with the clever artist, who always had a store of amusing anecdotes in reserve, or with the lady's man, who told us of his latest adventures. In that circle, Monsieur Roquencourt was not among those who talked least. If anyone mentioned a city, he had acted there; if anyone mentioned a famous personage, he had known an actor who had mimicked him to perfection, and he would proceed to give us a specimen.

I enjoyed listening; but I talked very little, and in what I did say, I did not mention myself. Caroline, who, for all her frivolous and coquettish air, observed very closely everything that took place in the salon, said to me one day:

"Monsieur Dalbreuse, everybody here tells us his or her own experiences; you alone have kept silent thus far. Why is it?"

"Presumably, I have none to relate, mademoiselle."

"Or that you don't choose to relate them. However, you are your own master. For my part, I tell everything that concerns me, because hitherto I have had nothing to keep secret. I am an orphan; my father, who was an army contractor, left me twenty-five thousand francs a year. I live with Monsieur Roquencourt, my mother's brother and my guardian; and he lets me do just as I choose, because he knows that I have been accustomed to that from my childhood. That is my whole history, and you know me as well now as if we had been brought up together."

She thought perhaps that her confidence would provoke mine; but I replied simply:

"How does it happen that, being as rich and lovely as you are, you have never married?"

"Ah! I was certain that you would ask me that question; I am asked it so often! Bless my soul! monsieur, is there such a terrible hurry about being married, and placing myself under the control of a man who perhaps would not let me do as I wished? I am so happy with my uncle and he is so good, especially when he doesn't talk about his Crispins and his Lafleurs! really, I tremble at the thought of losing my liberty; and then, I tell you frankly, I have never yet met any man who deserved that I should sacrifice so much to him."

"You are happy, mademoiselle; believe me, you are very wise to remain so; do not risk the repose of your whole life by binding yourself to someone by whom you think that you are loved, and who will betray you in the most dastardly way! No, do not marry."

Caroline gazed at me in amazement; she was silent for a few moments, then she began to laugh, saying:

"You are the first person who ever talked to me like that; I was right in thinking that you did not resemble the rest of the world."

On the day following this conversation, after listening, and laughing heartily the while, to the gallant remarks of a number of young men, Mademoiselle Derbin came, as she was accustomed to do, to the window from which I was gazing at the landscape which stretched out before us.

"Always admiring these mountains, are you not, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; I consider this region very interesting."

"Are you a painter, monsieur?"

"No, mademoiselle; I paint a little, however, but simply as an amateur."

"Ah! you paint? in what line?"

"Miniatures."

"Do you paint portraits?"

"I have tried it occasionally."

"Oh! it would be awfully good of you to paint mine. We have a great deal of time to ourselves here. I will give you sittings as often as you choose. I have been painted many times, but I have never thought the likeness good. Will you do it, Monsieur Dalbreuse?"

How can you refuse a lovely woman when she addresses a request to you, with her charming eyes fixed upon yours? Indeed, I had no reason for refusing what she asked.

"I will paint your portrait, mademoiselle, but I do not flatter myself that I shall be more fortunate than those who have done it before."

"Oh! perhaps you will; at all events, what does it matter? It will amuse us, and occupy the time. When shall we begin?"

"Whenever you choose."

"Right away then; we will have a sitting in my uncle's room; but I must have my hair dressed first, I suppose?"

"No, I prefer to paint you as you are, and not in a ball dress; do not make any preparations at all."

"As you choose."

"I will go for my box of colors."

"And I will go to tell my uncle. Oh! it is awfully good of you."

On going to my room, I found Pettermann humming a tune as he brushed my clothes, which he was always careful to look over to see if there were any buttons missing, or any holes in the pockets; and he always repaired the damage.

"Is monsieur going to paint?"

"Yes, Pettermann; and I fancy that we shall stay here a few days longer. You are not bored here, I hope?"

"No, monsieur, I am never bored anywhere, myself; besides, the wine is good here. By the way, what day of the month is it?"

"The seventeenth."

"The deuce! only the seventeenth! this month is very long!"

I guessed why he asked me the question, and I said to him:

"As you consider the wine good here, as I am enjoying myself, and as it is fair that you should do the same, act as if it were the end of the month."

"Oh, no! a bargain is sacred, monsieur. Since I have been with you, I have learned to respect myself; and if I do get drunk once a month still, it is because

I should be sick if I should stop drinking entirely. But never mind; if the wine is good here, the women are terribly inquisitive! prout!"

"The women are inquisitive? How do you know that?"

"Because these last few days they have done nothing but hang round me to try to make me talk."

"Who, pray?"

"At first it was the landlady and the servants in the inn; but when they found that that didn't work, there was a good-looking young woman who came to me herself, as if by accident."

"A lady who lives in the hotel?"

"Yes, the one with the little uncle who talks all the time."

"Mademoiselle Derbin?"

"Just so."

"What did she ask you?"

"She acted as if she just happened to pass through the yard where I was; she asked me first: 'Are you in Monsieur Dalbreuse's service?'"

"'Yes, mademoiselle.'"

"You should have told her, Pettermann, that you were travelling with me, but not as my servant."

"Why so, monsieur? I consider myself very lucky to belong to you; and as there must always be one who does what the other says, it is right that you should be the one to give the orders; therefore you are the master."

"What then, Pettermann?"

"Then, that young woman—or rather that lady—continued: 'Have you been with Monsieur Dalbreuse long?'"

"'About two years.'"

"'He seems like a very agreeable man, Monsieur Dalbreuse?'"

“ ‘He isn’t cross, mademoiselle.’

“ ‘What does he do in Paris?’

“All those questions began to tire me, and I replied rather short:

“ ‘He does what he chooses, mademoiselle; it doesn’t make any difference to me.’—At that she went away. But in a minute she came skipping back, and said to me almost in my ear, as she tried to slip a gold-piece into my hand:

“ ‘He is a bachelor, isn’t he?’—I didn’t take the money, but I touched my hat and said:

“ ‘Yes, mademoiselle, he is a bachelor.’—At that she began to laugh, and went away, saying:

“ ‘The servant is almost as unique as the master.’—Upon my word, if she isn’t inquisitive, I don’t know who is.”

So Mademoiselle Derbin was determined to find out who I was, what my rank and position were in society. My silence had piqued her. But to go so far as to ask if I were married—that was decidedly peculiar. Pettermann believed me to be a bachelor; I had never said anything in his presence which would lead him to suppose that I had ceased to be one. What did it matter to that young woman whether I was married or not? Could it be that she had taken a fancy to me? I could not believe it; I had never said a word of love to her. So that it was probably the whim of a coquette who desired to subject everybody to her empire. She had known me only a fortnight. Moreover, it seemed to me that I was no longer likely to inspire love, that no one could ever love me again.

I said all this to myself as I looked over my box of colors. But it did not prevent me from going to Mademoiselle Derbin, for she expected me; and even if I did attract her, that would be no reason for avoiding

her. We must leave such noble acts to the patriarchs of Genesis, whom we are by no means tempted to imitate.

They were waiting for me. The uncle was there; he congratulated me on my talent, and thanked me for my good-nature. Caroline was much perplexed as to the position she should take. I begged her to act as if I were not painting her portrait, so that there should be no affectation in the position, and I set to work.

My model was very docile; she looked at me and smiled very affably. The uncle walked about the room, and soon said:

"She will make a very pretty portrait, monsieur. I was painted once in the costume of Scapin. It was an artist of great talent—I have forgotten his name but it will come to me directly. It was at Bordeaux, at Madame la Comtesse de Vernac's, who entertained the leading artists of Paris—Molé, Saint-Phal, Fleury, Dugazon. In fact, it was at her house that I met Dugazon. Oh! the rascal! as amusing in society as he was on the stage. You must have seen Dugazon?"

"Yes, monsieur, I think so; but I was so young that I hardly remember. Mademoiselle, raise your head a little, if you please."

"To return to my portrait,—the artist considered me so amusing in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, my face was so absurd when I came out of the bag—You know *Les Fourberies de Scapin*?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Oh! how can you keep asking monsieur such questions, uncle? Does he know Molière? You would do much better to see if the picture looks like me yet."

"Are you crazy, my dear love, to expect that it will look like you after fifteen minutes?—So I was painted as Scapin, and it was an excellent likeness. That wasn't

my favorite part, however; I won my triumph as Pasquin in *Le Dissipateur*. I made them cry, monsieur, yes, I made them cry, by the way I said: 'The little that I possess!' There are a great many ways of saying that. I had heard Dugazon say it, and if you please, monsieur, I gave it an entirely different expression: 'The little that I possess!' There are some who declaim it; Dugazon always declaimed it, but I maintain that you should simply put truth and soul into it: 'The little that I possess!'—And I saw tears in people's eyes!—'The little that——'”

“Oh! for heaven's sake, uncle! are you trying to make us cry too? You distract monsieur's attention; you will be responsible for my portrait not looking like me.”

“Your uncle may talk, mademoiselle; I assure you that it doesn't interfere with my work at all.”

Caroline gave a little pout of vexation, which I would have liked to reproduce on the ivory, because it was very becoming to her. I thought that she wanted her uncle to leave us; but Monsieur Roquencourt had no such intention.

After walking about the room several times, he came to watch me work, then looked at his niece and exclaimed:

“Upon my word, Caroline has in her face, especially in her eyes, much resemblance to Mademoiselle Lange. You did not know Mademoiselle Lange, who used to act at the Français, did you?”

“No, monsieur.”

“Ah! Monsieur Dalbreuse, she was perhaps the one actress who had more truth, more charm in her way of speaking than any other; and a charming woman besides! I knew her well; she taught me to put on my rouge. It is a very difficult thing to put on one's rouge well; I used to daub my face all over with it. She said to me one

evening when I had just done Gros-René—you know, Gros-René in *Le Dépit Amoureux*:

“ ‘ La femme est, comme on dit, mon maître,
Un certain animal difficile à connaître,
Et de qui la nature est fort encline au mal ;
Et comme un animal est toujours animal,
Et ne sera jamais——’ ”

“ Oh! we have seen *Le Dépit Amoureux*, uncle! That speech isn't the best thing in Molière, in my opinion.”

“ As I was saying, I had been playing Gros-René, and with great success, on my word! I had made the audience laugh until they cried. Lange led me aside after the performance, and said to me: ‘ You acted like a god! you acted divinely; but, my friend, you don't know how to put on your rouge; you make big daubs everywhere; that isn't the way; you must put on a lot under the eyes; your eyes are very bright already, but you will see how much brighter that makes them; then, put on less and less toward the ears, and almost none at all on the lower part of the face.’—I followed her advice, and I gained greatly by it.”

“ Uncle, weren't you to play a game of backgammon this morning with that Englishman who challenged you yesterday? ”

“ It isn't this morning, my dear girl, but to-night that we are to play.”

“ I thought that it was this morning.”

“ You are mistaken.—Backgammon is a very fine game; do you play it, Monsieur Dalbreuse? ”

“ A little, monsieur.”

“ It was Dazincourt who taught me; he was a very fine player. I remember that one evening we played for one of his wigs; it was the wig that he wore in—wait

a minute—a beautiful wig, and that counts for a great deal on the stage. It was the wig he wore in——”

Caroline rose and exclaimed impatiently:

“That will do for to-day; I do not want to tire monsieur; let’s go to drive; it is a fine day and I long for the fresh air. Uncle, will you be good enough to fetch my bonnet?”

Monsieur Roquencourt went to fetch the bonnet, scratching his ear and muttering:

“Strange! I can’t remember the name of the part.”

When he had left the room, Mademoiselle Derbin said to me:

“To-morrow, if you choose, we will have a sitting earlier, when my uncle is reading the papers; for really he is terrible with his actors and his acting. One forgets what one is doing; it seems to me that you must be able to work better when there is no one beside you, talking; that is to say, monsieur, unless you are afraid to be alone with me.”

She smiled as she said that; but there was a touch of sadness in her smile. “Really,” I thought, “this young woman is able to assume every sort of expression. Sometimes laughing, playful, mocking; sometimes serious, thoughtful, and languishing; she is never the same for two minutes.”—Was it art, I wondered, or was it that the different sensations that she felt were instantly depicted upon her features? It mattered little after all. However, I had not yet answered her question; I felt almost embarrassed. At that moment her uncle returned with her bonnet, crying:

“This much is certain, that I won the wig by a *carme*, which gave me twelve points. Dazincourt jumped from his chair in vexation, and said: ‘I won’t play with you again.’”

Mademoiselle did not care to listen to any more; she took my arm, and we left the room. She took me to drive, without even asking me if I would like to go with them; she evidently divined that it would give me pleasure. She was successful at divination: I was never bored with her.

The next morning I went to her uncle's room at the hour she had appointed; I found her alone; I had no feeling of confusion or embarrassment, for I had no declaration to make to her; even if she had attracted me, I should not have told her so. I was not free, and I did not propose to deceive her; but I had nothing to fear. My heart would never know the sensation of love again; I liked Mademoiselle Derbin's company, I liked her disposition, her wit, her unreserve; I did full justice to her charms; but I was not in love with her.—I could never love again.

We set to work at once. I labored at her portrait with pleasure; but sometimes a cruel memory awoke in my heart; I remembered the delightful sittings which my wife had given me. What a joy it was to me to paint her! Ah! her smile was very sweet too, and her eyes were filled with love for me.

When such ideas assailed me, a very perceptible change took place in my expression, no doubt, for my model said to me for the second time:

"What on earth is the matter with you, Monsieur Dalbreuse? Don't you feel well?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"You assumed such a melancholy expression all of a sudden! If it is a bore to you to paint me, monsieur, there is no reason why you should go on."

"No, mademoiselle, on the contrary it is a great pleasure to me."

"Oh! you say that in a very peculiar tone."

I did not reply but went on with my work. Caroline became very serious and did not say another word.

"Would you mind smiling a little, mademoiselle? You do not usually have such a serious expression."

"It's because you say nothing to amuse me, and you yourself have sometimes an expression—oh! *mon Dieu!* what an agreeable man you are!"

"I may have memories which are not very cheerful; and what I am doing at this moment reminds me——"

"Of what?"

"Of a person whose portrait I once painted."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"A woman whom you loved, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes!"

Caroline changed color and rose abruptly, saying:

"That's enough for to-day; I won't pose any more."

"But, mademoiselle, we have just begun."

"I am very sorry, but I am tired; besides, I don't care any longer about having my portrait painted!"

"What new whim is this?"

"Well, monsieur, if I choose to have whims——"

"I am very sorry too, but I have begun your portrait, and I want to finish it."

"I tell you that I don't want a portrait; you would be obliged to keep it, and I should like to know what good it would do you? A man doesn't wear a portrait. Oh, yes! in a locket sometimes, I believe.—Well, well! now you are assuming your solemn expression again. Well, here I am, monsieur, here I am, don't be angry; great heaven! I will pose as long as you wish."

She resumed her seat. I glanced at her; she had hastily wiped her eyes, and yet I saw tears still glistening

in them. What an extraordinary woman! What a combination of coquetry and sensibility! What on earth was going on in her heart? I was sometimes afraid to guess.

We worked for a long time, but I made little progress with my task, for I was absent-minded; the past and the present engrossed me in turn. Caroline herself was thoughtful. Sometimes she talked to me about Paris, and I divined that she was anxious to learn what my business was. I saw no reason why I should not tell her that I was an advocate. She seemed pleased to learn that I practised that profession. Why did she take so much interest in my concerns? I had not addressed a word of love to her.

Our second sitting was more cheerful; we were becoming accustomed to each other. When I sighed, she scolded me and told me to work more carefully. When she was pensive, I begged her to smile, to play the coquette as she did in society. Those sittings passed very quickly. Really I could hardly recognize myself; there were times when I was afraid that I was becoming too thoroughly accustomed to Caroline's company. Ernest was quite right when he urged me to paint pretty women, in order to obtain distraction from my troubles.

XX

THE GAZETTE DES TRIBUNAUX

We had had ten sittings and the portrait was almost finished. In fact it might have been left as it was, for Caroline was delighted with it, and her uncle considered it as good a likeness as that of himself as Scapin; but I desired to do something more to it; and Caroline herself wished for some slight changes in the dress and in the hair. I thought that we should both be sorry when the sittings came to an end.

One evening, when the weather was bad and we had remained in the hotel with several other guests, the conversation became general. An old gentleman who was almost as loquacious as Monsieur Roquencourt, but much less affable, told us about a scandalous lawsuit which was reported in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*. It was a husband's petition for divorce on the ground of his wife's infidelity.

"There are many interesting details," he said, "which the newspaper gives with its own reflections thereon."

The old gentleman went up to his room to get the paper, which he was determined to read to us. I would gladly have dispensed with that favor. Whenever that subject was discussed I felt ill at ease. Those gentlemen laughed and jested freely concerning betrayed husbands. To no purpose did I pretend to laugh with them; I could not do it. I would have liked to change the subject, but I dared not; it seemed to me that they would

fathom my motive. Luckily, Mademoiselle Derbin was beside me, and she did not seem to pay much attention to the trial reported by the *Gazette des Tribunaux*.

"Messieurs," said an Englishman, "among us, the subject is viewed in a different light. It becomes almost a business transaction. We make the co-respondent pay very heavy damages."

"Can damages restore the honor of an outraged husband?" demanded an old Spaniard. "In my country, the reparation is swift, but it is terrible!"

"Messieurs," said Monsieur Roquencourt, "I remember acting in *Le Mariage de Figaro* with a friend of mine who was in the plight of the husband in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*. He was playing Almaviva. As everybody knew what had happened to him, you can imagine the personal applications of his lines that were made during the performance. There was much laughter; but for all that he acted very well. I was Figaro. I had the prettiest costume it is possible to imagine; white and cherry colored, all silk and embroidery and spangles. It cost me a great deal! But Dugazon, who saw it, was so delighted with it that he asked me to lend it to him so that he could have one made like it."

At that moment I was overjoyed to hear Monsieur Roquencourt talk about the parts he had acted; I hoped that that would change the subject permanently, and I was about to ask him for some more anecdotes of Dugazon when the infernal old gentleman arrived, newspaper in hand, crying:

"Here is the *Gazette*; I assure you that there are some very amusing details, which one may safely read before ladies, however."

"Does this conversation amuse you?" I asked Caroline in an undertone.

"Do you suppose that I listen to these chatterboxes? No indeed; I think that my thoughts are worth quite as much as their words."

As she spoke, she cast a tender glance at me and laid her hand on my arm, for I had taken a seat beside her. I lowered my eyes; I was entirely engrossed by the *Gazette des Tribunaux*.

The old gentleman put on his spectacles and drew near a lamp. We were definitively condemned to listen to the newspaper. There are people who insist upon amusing you against your will.

"This is the article, messieurs; it is in the Paris news; and the names are in big letters."

"That is very pleasant for the husband!" said the Spaniard, under his breath; "all Europe will know that he is a cuckold!"

"When a husband is foolish enough to go to law about such a bagatelle," said a young Frenchman, "he well deserves to have the whole world laugh at him."

"Bagatelle!" repeated the Spaniard, "when a man's honor is involved!"

"What a devil of a place has he put his honor in? Ha! ha! It was Beaumarchais who said that, and Beaumarchais had a devilish lot of wit! When I acted his Figaro, I was with——"

"I say, messieurs, don't you want to hear the newspaper?"

"Yes, indeed; we are listening."

"A case, of common enough occurrence in its general character, but very interesting in its details and in the course of the trial, was heard to-day in the Court of First Instance. Monsieur Ferdinand-Julien Bélan married in June, 1824, Mademoiselle Armide-Constance-Fidèle de Beausire. For several years——"

"Ferdinand Bélan?" I exclaimed, waking from my reverie. All eyes were turned upon me, and someone exclaimed:

"Do you know him? Is he a friend of yours? What sort of man is he? Tell us about him."

"I do know a person of that name, but perhaps it is not the same man. My Bélan is married, it is true, but I lost sight of him a long while ago. I know nothing whatever about him."

"Oh! it's probably this man."

"He must look a fool!" cried a young guest.

"It seems to me that to be a betrayed husband must give a man a queer look!"

"That is a young man's reflection," said the Englishman. "If such things could be read on the face, the French would laugh much less at them."

"Messieurs, I once played Sganarelle in *Le Cocu Imaginaire*; it was at Bordeaux. I played it afterward at Paris; but this that I am going to tell you about happened at Bordeaux. It was a performance that had been planned long before, and I was not to be in it. But all of a sudden the amateur who was to play Sganarelle became involved in a disastrous failure; he lost two hundred thousand francs. You can imagine that he didn't care to act in theatricals then. The company was in dire perplexity, when Molé, who was one of them, said: 'Pardi! I know a man who can help us out of the scrape if he will; he is a friend of mine, who acts like a little angel, and he happens to be in Bordeaux at this moment.' And everybody said: 'Oh! bring us your friend! Bring us your friend!' Molé came to me and said: 'Will you play Sganarelle in *Le Cocu Imaginaire*?' I answered: 'Why not?'

"'You will restore life to some charming women, whom you will embrace—Do you know the part?'

“ ‘No.’

“ ‘It is very long.’

“ ‘I will know it to-morrow.’

“ ‘I defy you to do it!’

“ ‘What will you bet?’

“ ‘A truffled turkey!’

“ ‘Done.’—The next day I played Sganarelle and I had a tremendous success!”

“I believe, messieurs, that I brought this newspaper in order to read it to you; and if you will permit me——”

That devil of a man would not be denied; and although I knew very well that it was about the Bélan whom I knew, I was not at all curious to hear the report of his suit. Luckily, the mistress of the house entered the salon at that moment. After saluting everybody, she went to Mademoiselle Derbin.

“Mon Dieu! if I dared, mademoiselle—if it would not offend you, I——”

“What is it, madame?”

“We have a new guest, a French lady who has been here since morning. She has come to take the waters, and anyone can see that she is not travelling for pleasure solely, for she seems to be very ill, to suffer a great deal.”

“Is it the young lady whom I saw this morning?” asked the Englishman.

“Yes, my lord.”

“She has a very interesting air.”

“But what can I do, madame?” asked Caroline.

“I beg pardon, mademoiselle, it’s like this. This lady, who has very good style and excellent manners, has nobody with her but her maid. She has not left her room since morning, and I am afraid that she is bored. I went up to her room for a moment just now, and told her that the guests were assembled in the salon this evening,

and that she ought to come down, that it would divert her. She neither consented nor refused. She seems very shy; but if anyone of the party, like yourself, mademoiselle, should go up and urge her to come, I am certain that she would not refuse. Poor woman! she seems so miserable! I am convinced that in company she would forget her suffering a little."

Several of the guests added their entreaties to the landlady's. I myself, well pleased that the newspaper should be forgotten, urged Mademoiselle Derbin to bring us the invalid.

"Since you are so curious to see this lady, messieurs," said Caroline, rising, "I will go to her as your ambassador. But do not rejoice overmuch beforehand, for I do not agree to succeed; and you will perhaps be obliged to content yourselves with addressing your compliments to the ladies who are in the salon now."

Having said this with fascinating gayety, she left the salon with the landlady. That incident cast Bélan's lawsuit into the shade, and I hoped that no one would recur to it; but I noticed that the old gentleman, who did not admit that he was beaten, had gone to a corner of the salon in evident ill humor, with the *Gazette des Tribunaux* still in his hand.

Several moments passed.

"Mademoiselle Derbin will not succeed," said the Spaniard; "if that lady is ill, she will not leave her room."

"Why not?" said a young man; "need a person become a hermit because she comes here to take the waters?"

"I believe that my niece will succeed, messieurs; for in truth she succeeds in everything that she undertakes, and if she has taken it into her head to bring this new

guest here, be sure that she will not return alone. My niece takes after me; I have played perhaps thirty parts in my life—what am I saying? I have played more than fifty!—Well, I assure you that at least a dozen of them I have learned in twenty-four hours, on the spur of the moment, like that of Sganarelle. But that was very long!—By the way, I haven't told you the effect that I produced on Molé. He had never seen me except in a servant's part; to be sure, Sganarelle is a servant's part, if you choose, but——”

“Here comes Mademoiselle Derbin, and she is bringing the lady,” said a young man who had opened the door of the salon.

Instantly in obedience to a natural impulse of curiosity, we formed a circle and all eyes were turned toward the door.

Caroline appeared, leading the newcomer by the hand. Everybody bowed to the lady, and I, as I was about to do the same, stood as if turned to stone; then I fell back upon my chair. In that pale, thin woman, evidently ill and suffering, who had entered the room, I recognized Eugénie.

She had not seen me; for, as she came in, she bowed, without looking at all the people assembled in the room; and then, guided by Caroline, she went to a seat at once. I was almost behind her; I dared not move or breathe.

“Messieurs,” said Mademoiselle Derbin, “madame has consented to accede to my entreaties; but I had a vast deal of difficulty in inducing her to leave her retreat, and you owe me much gratitude.”

The gentlemen thanked Caroline, who had seated herself near Eugénie. The conversation began anew. Eugénie took little part in it; she talked with no one but Mademoiselle Derbin, who questioned her about her

health. I heard one of the young men say to Monsieur Roquencourt:

"I recognize that lady, I saw her at a party in Paris two years ago. Her name is Madame Blémont, and her husband has deserted her; he was a good-for-nothing, a gambler, a rake."

"Poor woman!" said Monsieur Roquencourt; "there are so many of those rascals of husbands who act in that way! to say nothing of the Beverleys, the Othellos, the—I was asked once to play Beverley, and it is the only part that I ever refused!"

I glanced at the young man who had named my wife. I was quite certain that he did not know me, for I could not remember that I had ever met him in society. But I cannot describe what I suffered; the sight of Eugénie had revived all my pain. I would have liked to fly, but I dared not; I was afraid to move hand or foot; if she should turn her head slightly, she would see me.

However, that situation could not last long. Caroline, having ceased to talk to Eugénie, turned to me and said:

"Well, Monsieur Dalbreuse, why do you stand so far away? You look as if you were sulking. Pray come and talk with us a little."

I did not know what reply to make. But Eugénie had pushed her chair back as if to make room for me beside her neighbor; at the same moment she turned her eyes in my direction. Instantly I saw her sway from side to side, and her head fell against the back of her chair.

"This lady is ill!" cried Caroline, leaning over her. "Some salts, messieurs, quickly! Open the window; perhaps she needs air."

There was a general movement. I rose with the rest and was about to leave the salon, but Caroline called me, detained me, begged me to help her to carry the invalid to

the window, which had been opened. How could I avoid doing what she asked? And then too, the sight of that woman, whose eyes were closed and whose pale lips and emaciated features indicated great suffering, caused me profound emotion, and a sentiment which almost resembled pleasure. I was not hardhearted, but she had injured me so deeply! It seemed to me that I was beginning to have my revenge. Why then should I leave that salon? Was it for me to fly? No, I proposed to see how she would endure my presence.

While these ideas flitted through my mind, Caroline pushed me toward the chair in which Eugénie was sitting, saying:

"Well! for heaven's sake, monsieur, do you propose to stand there without budging? Oh! how awkward men are under some circumstances!"

We carried the chair to the window, and someone brought salts.

"Hold the lady's head," said Caroline to me. "Come this way. Upon my word, I don't know what you can be thinking about to-night, but you act as if you did not hear me.—Poor woman! how pale she is! But she is pretty, for all that, isn't she? Tell me, don't you think her pretty?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"I am very lucky to be able to get that out of you. Ah! she is coming to herself."

Eugénie opened her eyes. She seemed to be trying to collect her thoughts. At last she looked slowly about her, and I was the first person whom she saw. She instantly lowered her eyes and put her hand to her forehead.

"You frightened me terribly, madame," said Caroline. "How do you feel now?"

"Thank you, mademoiselle, it was an attack of vertigo; I am better. But I would like to go back to my room."

As she spoke, she tried to rise, but fell back in her chair, faltering:

"I feel quite helpless!"

"Pray stay with us; this will pass away; it comes from the nerves. You will be comfortable by the window. Solitude causes ennui, and ennui increases one's suffering. Isn't that so, Monsieur Dalbreuse?—Well! he isn't listening to me; I can't imagine what is the matter with him to-night."

While Caroline was speaking, I had walked away from Eugénie's chair. She remained seated there, with her face turned toward the window; she did not look into the salon again.

"I never had an ill turn but once in my life," said Monsieur Roquencourt, "and that was caused by the heat. I had agreed to play the part of Arlequin in *Colombine Mannequin*; I was not very anxious to do it, for I dreaded the mask; but the company begged so hard that I had to yield. It was Madame la Marquise de Crézieux who played Colombine. A fascinating woman, on my word! I had a weakness for her. When I saw her as Colombine, she looked so pretty, that I made it a point of honor to do my best, and I played Arlequin magnificently. I performed a thousand capers and tricks; I was a regular cat! At the end of the play they threw flowers to me; the audience was in transports, in delirium! But I, bless my soul! I could stand it no longer! I fell when I reached the wings; and if they hadn't torn my mask off at once, it would have been all over with me; I should have suffocated!"

Several persons went to Eugénie to ask her how she felt. I did not hear her replies, but she did not move.

She was afraid of meeting my eyes again, no doubt, if she turned her head. She had not brought her daughter with her. What a pity! And yet, if she had brought her, should I have been able to conceal my affection? Ah! I felt that I had remained there too long! I should have returned to Paris to see my daughter long before.

For several moments the conversation had lagged; some persons were talking together in undertones, but there was no animation. The old gentleman who had remained in a corner, with his newspaper in his hand, deemed the moment favorable, and drew his chair toward the centre of the room, saying:

"Gentlemen and ladies, I believe that we were talking just now of the trial which is reported in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, which I have in my hand; in fact, I was about to read what the paper says, when someone went to bring madame here. I imagine that you will not be sorry to hear the report now, and I will begin. Hum! hum!"

"It is very hard to read well," said Monsieur Roquencourt; "we have many authors who don't know how to read their works. Larive was the one who could read well; yes, he read perfectly! For my part, when I had a letter to read on the stage, I would not have the prompter give me a single word! But once a very amusing thing happened to me. It was in *L'Etourdi*, I believe."

"Monsieur," said the old gentleman angrily, coming forward with his newspaper, "do you or do you not wish me to read you the *Gazette*?"

"Oh! beg pardon! Read on, I pray you. I will tell you my story afterward; it will make you laugh."

I was on thorns. Was I to be compelled to listen to the report of that trial? And yet, was it not the

beginning of my revenge? Eugénie would suffer terribly on listening to all those details. But it seemed to me that I should suffer as much as she. The pitiless reader had unfolded the journal and put on his spectacles; we could not escape him.

“ ‘A case, of common enough occurrence in its general character, but very interesting in its details, and in the course of the trial——’ ”

“ You have read us that, monsieur.”

“ That is so; let us come to the trial. ‘Monsieur Bélan seeks to obtain a divorce from his wife Armide de Beausire, for infidelity. The facts which led Monsieur——’ ”

At the first words that he read, I watched Eugénie; she tried to rise and leave the room; but she had taken only a few steps when a low groan escaped from her lips, her limbs stiffened, and she fell at Mademoiselle Derbin's feet.

“ It is a nervous attack! ” people exclaimed on all sides; “ she is very ill; we must take her to her room.”

Several of the gentlemen offered their assistance; Eugénie was taken from the room, and Caroline followed. I remained there, and walked to the window. That sight, that groan which I seemed still to hear, had rent my very soul. I felt that I desired no more revenge at that price. I would leave that very night. I did not wish to kill her. If it depended only upon me, she would speedily be cured. People went and came in the salon. Some discussed that second swoon; others went to inquire about the invalid's condition. The old gentleman alone had returned to his corner, with an ill-humored scowl, and had put his paper in his pocket.

Caroline returned at last and everybody crowded about her. “ The lady is a little better,” she said, “ but really I am afraid that all the waters of Mont-d'Or will not restore her health.”

"I say, I can guess what caused that second fainting fit," said the young man who had mentioned Eugénie before. "Poor Madame Blémont! That is the lady's name——"

"Yes, I remember that the landlady called her so. Well! you were saying that the lady——"

"She was very unfortunate in her marriage; her husband left her, deserted her; she probably thought of all that, when she heard something about a husband bringing a suit against his wife."

"What, monsieur!" said Caroline; "that lady has been deserted by her husband?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; I have seen her several times at parties in Paris. I recognized her at once, although she is greatly changed."

"And her husband?"

"I did not know him; it seems that he was a monster! a gambler, dissipated and jealous—all the vices, in short; he left his poor little wife with two children on her hands, a boy and a girl."

"Oh! mon Dieu! There are some shameless men! That young woman has such a sweet and amiable manner! Certainly she is well adapted to make any man happy who is able to appreciate her! and perhaps she still loves him; for we are so soft-hearted, we cannot hate you, even when you most deserve it! Uncle, I certainly shall never marry."

Having said this, Caroline looked at me as if to read in my eyes what I thought about it. But I looked away and did not say a word.

Everybody prepared to retire. We bowed to one another and said good-night. Suddenly I felt a hand on my arm; it was Caroline, who said to me with an offended air:

"So it seems that I must wish you good-night this evening, monsieur! You can certainly flatter yourself that you have made yourself very unpleasant!"

That reproach brought me to my senses; I reflected that I proposed to go away before dawn, and that perhaps this was the last time that I should see Mademoiselle Derbin; so I stepped forward to take her hand; but she drew it back, saying in an offhand tone:

"I do not forgive so quickly; to-morrow we will see whether you deserve that I should make peace with you."

She left me, and I returned to my room. I felt that I must go away, that I must leave that house, that town. I felt that I could not endure to be in Eugénie's presence; moreover, she was ill and I must have compassion for her. But why had she come to disturb the happiness which I was enjoying in that spot? I had almost forgotten the past, Mademoiselle Derbin was so attractive! But after all, I should have had to leave her a little sooner or a little later. Suppose that she should find out that I was that Blémont, that man who was called a monster in society!—How they abused me! But that did not offend me in the least; on the contrary, I was overjoyed that people were deceived; I would rather be looked upon as a scoundrel than to air my grievances before the courts, like Bélan. Poor Bélan! I suspected that he would come to that.—But Caroline believed that I was a bachelor; an additional reason for going away. What could I hope for from that acquaintance? To have a friend? Oh, no! at Caroline's age, a husband is what is wanted; love is the essential sentiment; friendship is not enough for a heart of twenty-four years. She would eventually fall in with the man whom she was looking for, and she would forget me as quickly as she had made

my acquaintance. And I—oh! as soon as I had my daughter in my arms, I was quite certain that I should forget the whole world.

“I will call Pettermann,” I thought, “and send him to the post-house to order horses, and tell him to pack our trunks.”

I called my faithful companion several times, but I received no reply. He was not in the habit of going to bed before I did. I went up to his room, but he was not there. I asked the people in the hotel if they had seen him; a maid-servant remembered that about noon he had gone into a small cabinet adjoining a building at the end of the garden, and that he had had brought to him there, with an abundant luncheon, several bottles of Burgundy. She assured me that he had not come out since morning. I remembered then that it was the first of the month, the day which Pettermann ordinarily selected to divert himself; so I guessed what he was doing in the cabinet. I requested the maid to show me the way. We went with a light toward the building which the ex-tailor had selected for his celebration.

We saw no light through the window, so we went in. Pettermann, who evidently was as conscientious about getting completely drunk once a month, as in keeping sober the rest of the time, was stretched out, dead drunk, by the table, at the foot of a bench upon which he was probably sitting when he was able to sit erect.

“Mon Dieu! is he dead?” cried the servant; “he doesn’t move!”

“No, don’t be alarmed, he is only drunk; and as that happens only once a month now, he doesn’t get drunk by halves. What an unfortunate chance, when I wanted to go away to-night.”

“Go away! Why monsieur has not ordered horses.”

"Can I not obtain horses at any hour at the post-house?"

"Oh, yes! but your servant here is in a fine state to start! I did not suppose that monsieur was thinking about going away."

I went to Pettermann, I seized his arm and shook him, and called him by name.

"Prout! I am asleep," murmured the tailor at last.

"But, my friend, I need you, so try to wake up."

"Prout! I propose to drink enough to-day for a month; let me sleep; you can wake me when I am thirsty."

It was utterly impossible for me to obtain a word more from him.

"I advise you, monsieur, to let your servant pass the night here," said the girl; "he will be left in peace, nobody will disturb him. Anyway, you see that it would be hard to make him stir. You can't take him away in this condition!"

The girl was right; I could not hope for anything from Pettermann that night. If I left Mont-d'Or, he was in no condition to accompany me. Should I go without him, or wait until the next day before leaving the town? The latter course seemed to me the more reasonable. Besides, I remembered that I was in possession of Made-moiselle Derbin's portrait; after all the courtesies which she and her uncle had lavished upon me, would it not have been boorish to send the portrait to her without so much as bidding her good-bye? I determined to remain until the morrow; and to see to it that I did not meet Eugénie again before my departure.

I returned to my room and went to bed. I longed to go away, and yet I believe that I was not sorry to be obliged to remain.

XXI

A CHATTERBOX

On waking the next morning, my first thought was that Eugénie was under the same roof with me. How changed she was! How pale and sad! Was it remorse, repentance, that had caused that change? Ah! it was very good of me to assume that it was; had she shown any remorse when I wrote to her to inform her that we must part and to ask her for my daughter? Had she shown any when she passed me so haughtily in the Bois de Boulogne? No; and moreover the sin that she had committed is the one for which repentance is least frequently felt; this is not a moral truth, but it is the truth none the less.

No matter, I was determined to go. I did not propose to have a repetition of the previous evening. I did not propose to meet Madame Blémont again, and I did propose to return to my daughter. Poor child! With whom had she been left? And Ernest did not write to me! But I forgot that I had not let him know that I had made a prolonged stay in that town, where I expected to remain only a day or two.

I rose and was about to ring for Pettermann, when, happening to glance at my mantel, I saw a note and a memorandum book which were not there the night before.

I walked toward the mantel. That memorandum book was mine; it was the one that I had handed to Ernest when we parted; by what chance did I find it there? I

took up the note. Ah! I recognized that writing. It was Eugénie who had written: "For Monsieur Dalbreuse." It was she who had sent me that book. The idea of her wanting me to have her portrait! What insolence! Should I not send it all back to her, without reading her note? Yes, I should have done it; but as one does not often do what one should do, I did not resist my curiosity, but I opened the note.

"I have learned, monsieur, that you wished to leave this hotel last night. Let not my presence cause you to leave a place where you seem to be enjoying yourself; I swear to you, monsieur, that you will not meet me again; I shall not leave my room again, and if my strength had allowed, I should have gone away instantly. I have left your daughter with Madame Firmin. She and her husband consented to undertake to act as parents to your children. I think that you will approve of my having left your Henriette with them; however, you will be at liberty to dispose of your daughter as you choose; I give her back to you, I no longer desire to retain anything except my tears and my remorse."

How weak we are! I was incensed with her when I opened the note, and when I had read it I was deeply moved, completely upset! That letter was still wet with her tears. What a difference between it and the one with which she answered mine two years before! If she had written thus to me then—I did not know what I would have done. She gave me back my daughter, she had left her with Marguerite; how did it happen that she had entrusted her daughter to her? What change had taken place in her in two years? I was utterly at sea; but I was

delighted to know that my little Henriette was with my loyal friends.

As for the memorandum book, I could not understand with what purpose she had sent it to me. Did she hope to force me to love her again, did she hope to obtain forgiveness by restoring that portrait to me? Oh, no! I had loved her too dearly to forgive her. Why had Ernest given her that souvenir? I determined to send it back to her.

I took the book in my hands and turned it over and over, as if to make sure that it was really mine; finally I opened it, to see if the painting had faded much in two years.

What did I see? The portrait of Eugénie was no longer there, but the portrait of my daughter, of my Henriette! Dear child! Yes, it was really she; there was her smile, there were her eyes. It seemed to me as if I had her before me! I kissed my child's image. "Dear book," I thought, "you shall never leave me again now; for although a child may tire of seeing her father, a father always takes pleasure in gazing at his child's features."—Ah! how grateful I was to Eugénie for sending me that portrait! If anyone could still plead for her, who could undertake that duty better than her daughter?

I desired to know who had placed those things on my mantel. I rang and Pettermann appeared, still rubbing his eyes.

"Pettermann, you were drunk yesterday?"

"Yes, monsieur, it was my day."

"How long have you been awake?"

"Why, not very long. I had a downright good one yesterday. Prout!"

"I know it, for I saw you and spoke to you."

"Faith, I didn't see you or hear you, monsieur."

"Then you haven't told anybody in the inn that I intended to go away last night?"

"Go away last night?"

"And it wasn't you who placed this memorandum book and this note on my mantel this morning?"

"No, monsieur, I haven't been into your room since yesterday morning."

"Pettermann, send me the little maid-servant, whose name I believe is Marie,—a stout, short girl."

"Oh! I know, monsieur, she is the one who brought me my breakfast yesterday."

The maid appeared. She denied having brought the note and the book; but she confessed that she had said that morning, before the other servants, that I had wanted to go away in the night.

What did it matter by whom Eugénie had sent me those things? I was no longer angry with her for doing it; but as I did not wish to compel her to keep her room, I would go away. And yet, if I should go at once, she would think that I could not endure to be near her, and I did not want to convey that idea to her, as a reward for the presents she had made me. I did not know what course to pursue.

I had ordered breakfast served in my room, and was about to sit down, when Monsieur Roquencourt appeared.

"Good-morning, Monsieur Dalbreuse."

"Monsieur, accept my respects. What happy circumstance affords me the honor of this early visit?"

"My dear friend, my niece has sent me to ask you to come to breakfast with us and to drink a cup of tea. She hurried me, she hurried me so! Luckily, I dress very fast. When one has acted in theatricals, one is so accustomed to change one's costume! By the way, my dear Monsieur Dalbreuse, what is this that my niece tells me?

You attempted to go away last night, to leave us without even bidding us good-bye?"

"It is true, monsieur, that——"

"The idea of skipping scenes like that! of running away! I don't understand that anyone is pursuing you, like Monsieur de Pourceaugnac. Ha! ha! ha! how I have made people laugh playing that devilish Pourceaugnac! It is a terribly hard part; many people have acted it, but the man whom I rank above all others in it is Baptiste Cadet. Ah! such admirable fooling, monsieur! For Pourceaugnac is not stupid, he's a fool, but a well-bred fool; he shouldn't be made an idiot with no manners. Baptiste Cadet grasped perfectly all those delicate shades of character, and——"

"But, monsieur, if mademoiselle your niece is waiting for us——"

"Yes, you are right, she is waiting for us. I warn you that she is terribly angry with you. That's why she wants you to come to breakfast with us. She said that you were a horrid man. Ha! ha!"

I followed Monsieur Roquencourt. So Caroline proposed to scold me because I had intended to go away; had she a right to do it? To my mind, she had not.

Mademoiselle Derbin was sitting down and drinking tea; she honored me with a slight nod; I saw plainly enough that she was angry, but that she did not mean to appear so.

Monsieur Roquencourt took my hand and presented me to his niece with a comical expression on his face.

"'Bourguignon, here is Lisette; Lisette, here is Bourguignon.'"

"What does all this mean, uncle?" said Caroline testily. "What are you talking about, with your Bourguignons and your Lisettes?"

"What! what does that mean? Do you mean to say that you never saw *Les Jeux de l'Amour et du Hasard*?"

"Did you bring monsieur here to act? I thought that it was to breakfast with us.—Pray sit down, monsieur; my uncle is unendurable with his theatricals!"

"In other words, you are cross this morning; that's the real fact."

"I, cross? Upon my word! why should I be cross? What reason have I for being cross?"

"I tell you that you are. However, I warned Monsieur Dalbreuse; I said to him: 'My niece is mortally offended with you!'"

"Really, uncle, I don't know what is the matter with you to-day. Did I tell you to say anything like that? Why should I be offended with monsieur? Because he intended to go away last night without even bidding us adieu? But after all, is not monsieur his own master? We are nothing more than mere acquaintances of his; people with whom he is content to amuse himself when it does not put him out, but of whom he ceases to think as soon as he has left them."

"Oh! I trust you don't think that, mademoiselle."

"Yes, monsieur, I do think it; in fact I am convinced of it; if you had looked upon us in any other light, if you had had ever so little regard for us, you would not have wanted to leave us thus, and we should not be indebted solely to the drunkenness of your servant for the pleasure of seeing you again to-day."

"Mademoiselle, an unexpected circumstance sometimes forces us to part from those persons who are most attractive to us."

"Yes, to be sure, when there are other persons whom we are in a hurry to see, and for whom we forget even the simplest rules of courtesy."

"My dear fellow, I warned you—she is very angry with you."

"Mon Dieu! how disagreeable you are to-day, uncle!"

Monsieur Roquencourt laughed and drank his tea; I did the same. Caroline said nothing more, and did not turn her eyes in my direction. The uncle bore the whole weight of the conversation.

After a few moments, Caroline said to him:

"Have you heard from Madame Blémont this morning, uncle?"

"No, not yet."

"That lady has a most distinguished air; I like her appearance very much."

"Yes, she has very beautiful eyes; she reminded me of Mademoiselle Contat in——"

"Uncle, would it not be polite for you to go in person to ask how she passed the night?"

"I! why my dear girl, that lady is all alone; would she care to receive a visit from a man?"

"Oh! you have reached the age, uncle, when visits from you are of no consequence."

"What do you say, niece? Do you know that I am still quite capable of making conquests? And if I chose——"

"But I am sure that you do not choose, my dear uncle. Go up to that lady's room, I beg you."

"I will go, but I will not answer for the consequences."

When her uncle had left us, Caroline turned to me, and said in a tone which denoted a depth of feeling that I had not supposed her to possess:

"Why were you going away so suddenly and without seeing me? Tell me why, I beg you."

"Urgent business summoned me to Paris."

"I do not believe that; you had no letter yesterday. What had I done to you to cause such an abrupt departure? Had I said anything which hurt you? I am sometimes so foolish, so thoughtless——"

"No, mademoiselle, far from it. I am overwhelmed by your kindness, your indulgence."

"My kindness! my indulgence! anyone would think that you were talking to your tutor! But why were you going, then?"

"I cannot tell you, mademoiselle."

"Aha! so monsieur has secrets. All right! I prefer to have you tell me that. But my portrait—did you intend to carry that away?"

"No, mademoiselle, I should have had it delivered to you."

"You would have sent it to me! but it is not finished; there is a great deal still to be done on it."

At that moment the uncle returned and said:

"The lady is not visible yet. I expected as much. But she is greatly touched by our thoughtfulness and feels a little better this morning."

"I am glad of that. I will go to see her.—By the way, uncle, when do we return to Paris?"

"When! upon my soul! that is a sensible question! I do exactly as she wishes, and she pretends to wait upon my desires. Ha! ha! that's a good joke!"

"Well, it seems to me that we might pass another week here. And if Monsieur Dalbreuse's business were not so urgent, we would invite him to accept a seat in our carriage, and take him to Paris with us.—Well, monsieur, will you tell us what you think of my uncle's proposition?"

"Yes, my dear fellow; for although my niece always arranges everything to suit her own whim, I must needs

pretend to have done it. However, be sure that I shall be most delighted to have you for a travelling companion."

I did not know what to say, what to decide upon; it seemed to me that I ought to go, and yet it would be most agreeable to me to remain. A week soon passes. I should not come into contact with Madame Blémont, since she would remain in her room, and she herself had entreated me not to go away.

While I made these reflections, Caroline came to my side. At last she tapped me lightly on the shoulder.

"Whenever you are ready, monsieur,—we are waiting for your reply."

"Oh, excuse me, mademoiselle; I was thinking——"

"Will you return to Paris with us?"

"I am afraid of incommoding you. I have someone with me."

"Your German? There is a seat behind the carriage."

"Very well, I accept, mademoiselle."

"Ah! that is very kind of you!"

Once more Mademoiselle Derbin was in a charming humor. She arranged a drive for the day, intending to visit some points of view in the neighborhood of which someone had told her. We must be ready in an hour; she left us to attend to her toilette; we were to have no sitting for the portrait that day.

Caroline was a spoiled child; that was evident from her wilful manner, from her fits of impatience when her whims were not gratified; but she was so attractive, so fascinating when she chose to be agreeable, that it was really difficult to resist her. I believed that she had an affectionate, susceptible heart, a little inclined to enthusiasm perhaps. The interest that she manifested in me troubled me sometimes; I dreaded lest she should be in love with me. I dreaded it, because that love could not

make her happy; but in the depths of my heart I should have been flattered, yes, enchanted; for our self-esteem is always more readily listened to than our reason.

To divert my mind from such ideas, I gazed at my daughter's portrait, I asked her pardon for not returning to her at once; but I knew that she was with Ernest and his wife, and I was certain that she was well and that they often talked to her about me.

The hour for our drive arrived and I joined Mademoiselle Derbin and her uncle. Caroline wore a lovely costume; her great dark eyes shone with a deeper light than usual; they expressed pleasure and satisfaction.

"Do you think that I look well in this dress, monsieur?" she asked.

"I think that you always look well, mademoiselle."

"Is that true? Do you mean what you say?"

"To be sure I do. Besides, I am only the echo of the whole world."

"I do not like to have you an echo; I don't ask you what other people say; that is entirely indifferent to me."

We were just about starting when Caroline exclaimed:

"By the way, suppose I should invite Madame Blémont to go with us?"

"You know very well that she is ill, mademoiselle; she will refuse."

"A drive cannot fail to do her good. I am going to ask her."

"You are taking useless trouble, mademoiselle."

"We will see about that, monsieur."

She paid no heed to me and left us. But I was not alarmed; Eugénie certainly would not accept.

Monsieur Roquencourt came up to me and, pointing to his waistcoat, which was made of white silk, with colored flowers, and cut after the style of Louis XV, said to me:

"What do you think of this waistcoat?"

"It is very original."

"I wore it in the part of Monsieur de Crac."

"I can well imagine that it must be very effective on the stage."

"All the ladies raved over it; but I played Monsieur de Crac very nicely too. In the first place, I talk Gascon as well as if I were a native of Toulouse, and Dugazon gave me a few lessons for that part. My first lines were admirable:

" ' Enfants, petits laquais qué jé né logé pas,
Jé suis content ; allez, je paîrai vos papas.
On né mé vit jamais prodigué dé louanges,
Mais ils ont rabattu commé des pétits anges.' "

Monsieur Roquencourt might have recited the whole play if he pleased, for I was not listening to him; I was awaiting Mademoiselle Derbin's return most impatiently. At last she appeared, and, as I hoped, alone; there was an expression of something more than annoyance on her face.

"Let us go, messieurs," she said; "Monsieur Dalbreuse predicted that my trouble would be thrown away; Madame Blémont refuses to come with us."

We entered the carriage and began our drive. I was most anxious to know what those ladies had said to each other, but I dared not question Caroline. She saved me the trouble, for she said, gazing earnestly at me:

"Monsieur Dalbreuse, do you know Madame Blémont?"

"I, know that lady? Why,—no, mademoiselle."

"You act as if you weren't quite sure."

"I beg your pardon, but why did you ask me that question?"

"Because she did nothing but talk about you all the time I was with her; asking me if I had known you long, if we had ever met anywhere before. That struck me as rather strange. When I told her that we intended to return to Paris together, she made a wry face. Ha! ha! it is very amusing.—And you say that you never met her in Paris?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Then you apparently made a conquest of her last night; isn't that so, uncle?"

"My dear girl, what would there be so extraordinary in that? I myself made ten conquests in the part of Figaro. To be sure, my cherry and white costume was very elegant."

"It seems that Monsieur Dalbreuse does not need to be dressed as Figaro in order to fascinate the ladies. I confess that this particular one does not attract me so much as she did. I looked closely at her this morning. Great heaven! such thinness! such pallor! She certainly can never have been very pretty."

I was on the point of contradicting her, but I restrained myself and said nothing.

After a drive of several hours, we returned to the hotel. We noticed much commotion among the people of the house, and a servant informed us that new guests had arrived: two English lords and their ladies, and a gentleman from Paris, who alone made as much fuss as four people.

Caroline went at once to change her dress, in order to outshine the Englishwomen, and perhaps also to turn the heads of the Englishmen and the Parisian.

I returned to my room and reflected upon what Mademoiselle Derbin had told me of her conversation with Madame Blémont. What did my intimacy with Caroline

or with any woman matter to Eugénie? Was I not at liberty to dispose of my heart as I chose? But women have so much self-esteem that even when they no longer love you they are vexed to see that you follow their example. Men are much the same too.

I went without apprehension to the evening reception, being fully persuaded that Madame Blémont would not be tempted to appear.

There were many people in the salon. The English party was already there; the two young women were young and pretty and their travelling companions—I did not know whether they were their husbands—paid no attention to them, but were already deep in politics with the Spaniard and some Frenchmen. Several young men were already playing the gallant with the young women. I joined Mademoiselle Derbin, who was almost deserted for the new arrivals, although they were not to be compared with her.

I sat down beside her; I was pleased to see that she was not annoyed at the desertion of her little court.

“So you don’t do like the rest?” she said with a smile; “you don’t go to offer incense to the strangers?”

“I have no inclination to do so; why should one change when one is well off?”

“That often happens, however.”

“Alas, yes! but apparently it may be that one is well off and does not realize it.”

“I trust that I shall never have the experience.”

I do not know how it happened that at that moment Caroline’s hand was under mine. She did not take it away, and we sat thus for a long while, paying no heed to what was taking place in the salon. But the touch of that hand reminded me of Eugénie and of the time when I was paying court to her. Doubtless Caroline had no

suspicion that the pressure of her hand made me think of another woman, and that it was that which made me pensive. But we very often deceive ourselves with respect to the sensations which we arouse. And the thing which flatters our self-esteem would sometimes cause us naught but vexation if we knew its real cause.

Suddenly the door of the salon was noisily opened and someone entered, talking very loud and making a great uproar. I turned, for whenever anyone entered the salon, I felt a thrill of uneasiness.

"This is the gentleman from Paris, no doubt," said Caroline.

I looked at the newcomer, who was just saluting the company; it was Bélan!

He had already turned in our direction; he bowed to Mademoiselle Derbin, and, in spite of the signals that I made to him, exclaimed when he saw me:

"I am not mistaken! it is Blémont! dear Blémont, whom I have not seen for two years! Ah! my dear friend, embrace me!"

He opened his arms; it seemed to me that I could choke him with great good will. All eyes were turned upon us. I could not conceal my embarrassment, my irritation. Bélan seized me and embraced me in spite of myself, still exclaiming:

"Dear Blémont! how pleasant it is to meet a friend when travelling, isn't it?"

"Hum! may the devil take——"

"What's that? He has not yet got over his surprise."

Caroline, her attention attracted by the name of Blémont, gazed steadfastly at me and said to Bélan:

"Why, are you not mistaken, monsieur? It is Monsieur Dalbreuse whom you are speaking to. Am I not right, monsieur? Pray answer!"

I did not know what to say. Bélan rejoined:

"So his name is Dalbreuse now? Faith, my dear fellow, I never knew you by that name, but I understand—ah! the rascal!—it was when he left his wife that he changed his name, in order to play the bachelor."

"His wife!" cried Caroline.

"His wife!" several others repeated.

"Monsieur," I said, with great difficulty restraining my anger, "who requested you to go into details which concern nobody but me?"

"Mon Dieu! I had no idea that it was a secret, my dear Blémont; and then, I have just met your wife in the garden; and now I find you here; so I suppose that it's all settled, that you have come together again, and——"

"That is enough, monsieur."

"Your wife in the garden! what! is she your wife?" said Caroline, under her breath.

I lowered my eyes. At that moment I wished that the earth would open and conceal me from every eye; I heard people saying on all sides:

"He is the sick woman's husband!"

Bélan, observing my embarrassment and the effect his words had produced in the salon, gazed at me with a stupid expression, muttering:

"If you are angry, I am very sorry; but I could not guess! you ought to have warned me. Of course you know what has happened to me? Parbleu! there is no mystery about that; my case was reported in the *Gazette des Tribunaux* a few days ago. I am—oh! it is all over; I am—I don't care to say the word before these ladies. But see how unlucky I am! the court has decided that there were no proofs; it condemns me to continue to live with my wife, and insists that I am not a cuckold.—Bless my soul! the word slipped out after all!"

"Cuckold!" repeated several young men with a laugh. "Can it be that monsieur is the Monsieur Ferdinand Bélan of whom the Gazette des Tribunaux had something to say recently?"

"I am the man, messieurs: Julien-Ferdinand Bélan, who sought a divorce from Armide-Constance-Fidèle de Beausire. They have condemned me to keep my wife, but I shall appeal. I am certain that I am a cuckold; my judges were bribed."

They surrounded Bélan, they examined him, exchanging smiles, and questioning him. The result was that attention was diverted from me. I took advantage of that fact, and without raising my eyes, without noticing Caroline's condition, I hurried from the salon.

I went up to my room, I sent for Pettermann, and ordered him to make everything ready for our departure. I determined to go away at the earliest possible moment. Ah! how I regretted that I had not followed my plan of the day before! If I had gone then, I should have avoided that scene, and no one would know—But I should never see all those people again. And Caroline—and her uncle—in what aspect should I appear to their eyes? As a villain, a schemer perhaps! people always form a bad opinion of a man who conceals his name. That infernal Bélan! what fatal chance led him where I was?

I went downstairs to pay my bill. I determined to return to Paris by post, and not to stop *en route*, for fear of other encounters. The landlady was very sorry, she said, at my sudden departure; but I paid her and ordered my horses.

While I was waiting for the post-chaise to be made ready, and the horses to arrive, I paced the courtyard of the hotel in great agitation. I did not wish to go into

the garden, for fear of meeting Madame Blémont, who, Bélan said, was there alone; I did not wish to return to the house either, for I feared to meet someone from the salon. So I sat down on a stone bench in a corner of the courtyard. It was dark and I could not be seen from the house. I abandoned myself to my thoughts; there were some persons there whom I regretted to leave, but I tried to console myself by thinking that I was going back to my daughter, and that I should soon see her.

Someone passed me; it was a woman. She stopped, then walked toward me. Had she seen me? Yes, she came to where I was and sat down beside me. It was Caroline! I could not see her features; but from her tremulousness of voice and her hurried breathing, I divined her agitation.

"I was looking for you, monsieur; I wanted to speak with you."

"And I myself, mademoiselle, was distressed that I was unable to bid you adieu. But I am waiting for the post horses; I am going away."

"Going away? I suspected as much. You are right, monsieur; indeed, you should have gone away before. I am very sorry that I detained you this morning. Ah! I can understand now why you wished to shun Madame Blémont's presence! So it is true, monsieur, that you are her husband?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"You are married, and you concealed it from me, and you—oh! your behavior has been shocking! I hate you, I detest you, as much as I esteemed and liked you before. You are married! Why didn't you tell me so, monsieur?"

"As I had ceased to live with my wife, it seemed to me, mademoiselle, that I was at liberty to——"

"At liberty, yes, of course you were at liberty. What do you care for the distress, the torture you may cause others? Perhaps you laugh at it in secret. I see that there was no mistake in what people said of you. And yet the portrait was not flattering. However, you must have heard it yourself yesterday. Was it the truth, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"So you abandoned your wife without cause, without lawful reason?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"And you saw her condition, her suffering—and it did not touch you? you did not throw yourself at her feet and ask her pardon for your wrongdoing?—Oh! you are a monster!"

She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and wept and sobbed. I could do nothing but sigh and hold my peace. At last she continued:

"You must go back to your wife, monsieur; it is your duty. Won't you do it? Remember what an effect the sight of you had upon her! Poor woman! how far I was from suspecting! And that does not make you repent of your conduct? Mon Dieu! your heart is pitiless! Ah! I had not formed that opinion of you.—But, Monsieur Dalbreuse—that name alone comes to my mind—promise me, swear to me that you will go back to your wife."

"No, mademoiselle, I cannot make you a promise which I have no intention of keeping. We are parted forever."

"Forever! In that case, monsieur, I must bid you adieu, and forever also; it would not be proper for me to see again a man who has represented himself to be what he is not. You had not enough confidence in me

to tell me.—But, after all, what could he have told me? That he had abandoned his wife and children. Oh, no! such a confidence would have aroused my indignation; it was much better to be agreeable, to try to please me, to conceal the fact that he was bound for life; for that is the way you behaved toward me. And yet, monsieur, if I had loved you, if I had allowed myself to be seduced by these deceitful appearances, would you have made me unhappy too?—Well! why don't you answer me, monsieur?"

"I believe, mademoiselle, that I have never said a word to you which could lead you to believe that——"

"No, that is true, you have said nothing to me. I am a coquette, a foolish girl. Oh, no! you have never tried to please me.—But you have my portrait, and it seems to me that it is useless, to say the least, for you to keep it: for I trust that we shall never see each other again, monsieur."

"Here it is, mademoiselle; I intended to send it to you from the first post-office."

Caroline took, or rather, snatched the portrait from my hands; at that moment a servant called me and Pettermann shouted that the horses were ready.

I rose: Caroline did the same; but at the first step that I took she seized my arm and said to me in an imploring tone:

"Monsieur, I cannot believe that your heart is deaf to the names of husband and father. Perhaps your departure will cause the death of her who came here, I doubt not, in the hope of being reunited to you. Oh! do not disappoint her hope. Give her back a husband, give your children a father. Will all the pleasures of which you are going in search equal those which await you with the wife who adores you? For she does adore you,

I am sure, and she will forgive you. Just think that she is here, in yonder garden. She hears you, perhaps. Look, see that white shadow which I can make out near the garden gate."

In truth, despite the darkness, I fancied that I saw a woman. I instantly disengaged my arm and hurried away from Caroline; I ran across the courtyard and jumped into the carriage which was awaiting me; Pettermann followed me and we drove away.

XXII

THE CHILDREN

We made the journey without stopping. The farther I left Eugénie behind, the more relieved I felt. I could not understand how I had ever consented to remain where she was. Mademoiselle Derbin must have had great influence over me to make me forget all my resolutions. Should I ever have reached the point of standing in Madame Blémont's presence without emotion? Oh, no! that could never be. When she defied me, I was angry; but now that she seemed to be suffering, I was more embarrassed than ever before her.

We arrived in Paris. When we left the chaise, poor Pettermann could not walk, his trousers were stuck to him; despite all his efforts to conceal his suffering, he made wry faces, which would have amused me if I had not been in such haste to reach Ernest's house. I hired a cab and assisted my companion to enter it; he sat opposite me, exclaiming:

"Prout! this is what one might call travelling fast: two relays more and my rump would have been cooked."

I was going to see my daughter again, to embrace her at my ease. How slow that driver was! how lazily his horses went! At last we arrived in front of Firmin's house; I jumped from the cab before Pettermann had succeeded in moving.

Another disappointment: Firmin and his wife were at Saint-Mandé, where they had bought a little house; they passed the whole summer there. So I must go to Saint-Mandé. I procured their address, I returned to the cab, and we started again, to the utter despair of Pettermann, who had risen and could not sit down again.

Luckily, Saint-Mandé is not far from Paris. When we reached the village, I alighted, for I could go more rapidly on foot; I hurried forward and soon spied the house that had been described to me: two floors, gray blinds, an iron gate, and a garden behind; that was the place. I rang, or rather jerked, the bell. A servant came to the door.

"Monsieur Firmin?"

"This is where he lives, monsieur."

I asked no more questions, but hastened up the first flight of stairs that I saw; I paid no attention to the maid, who called after me: "Monsieur is at work and doesn't want to be disturbed."—I was sure that Ernest would forgive me if I interrupted him in the middle of a scene or of a couplet.

I reached the first floor and passed through several rooms; at last I found my author. He opened his mouth to complain of being disturbed; but on recognizing me, he threw down his pen, and rushed to embrace me.

"So you have come back at last, my dear Henri! We have been expecting you every day."

"Yes, here I am, my friend, and in a terrible hurry to see my daughter."

"She is here. Your—your wi—Madame Blémont placed her in our charge."

"I know it."

"You know it? And I hoped to surprise you! Who told you?"

"Eugénie herself."

"You have seen her?"

"At Mont-d'Or. I will tell you all about it. But pray tell me where Henriette is."

"All the children are in the garden with my wife."

"Come, show me the way. But I beg you, say nothing to her; I want to see if she will recognize me; a child forgets so quickly at her age!"

"My friend, it isn't the children alone who forget quickly. I am sure your daughter will recognize you."

We went down into the garden; my heart beat fast with pleasure. At the end of a path I saw Madame Firmin seated on a grassy bank; a little beyond was a patch of turf, on which four children were playing. My eyes sought my daughter only, and I recognized her at once. She had grown, but she had changed very little.

The children were engrossed by their play, and they did not hear us coming. Marguerite caught sight of us, and on recognizing me she started to meet us. I motioned to her to stay where she was and to say nothing. I walked softly to the patch of turf; I crept behind Madame Ernest, to where a lilac bush concealed me from the children. Then I called Henriette aloud.

She raised her head and looked about her in amazement, saying:

"Who called me? It wasn't you, was it, my dear friend?"

"No," said Marguerite, "but perhaps it was my husband, for here he is now."

"Oh, no, it wasn't his voice. It is funny, but it was a voice that I know."

I called again without showing myself. Henriette seemed startled; her face flushed and she trembled; she looked about in all directions, crying:

"Why, I should think that it was papa's voice!"

I could hold out no longer; I stepped from behind the bush; Henriette saw me, uttered a shriek, and rushed into my arms, saying again and again:

"Oh! it is my papa! it is my papa!"

"Dear love! how happy it makes me to hold you in my arms again! how could I have delayed my return so long!"

I sat down beside Madame Ernest and took my daughter on my knee.

"So you recognized me, did you?" I asked her.

"Oh, yes, papa; I recognized your voice too."

"Have you thought of me sometimes?"

"Yes, papa, and I said that you were an awful long time away."

"My dear love, after this, I won't leave you any more."

Ernest's two children had left their play and had drawn near to look at me. A little boy, about three years old, alone had remained on the grass; he looked at us with a timid air. Suddenly my daughter left my knee and ran to the little boy, took his hand, and led him to me, saying:

"Come, Eugène, and kiss papa."

I had guessed that it was he. I examined him closely: he had pretty chestnut hair, lovely eyes, a pink and white complexion, and a gentle expression; he looked very

much like Eugénie; that was all that I could discover in his features.

Doubtless my face had grown stern, for the child seemed to be afraid to come forward. I could not help smiling, however, when he said to me with a comical gravity:

“Good-morning, papa.”

I kissed him on the cheek, but sighed as I did so, with a heavy weight at my heart. Then I put him down and he returned at once to the grass. It seemed that the poor little fellow noticed that I had kissed him against my will.

I took my daughter on my knee again; she jumped about and clapped her hands for joy, saying:

“Now, when mamma comes back, I shall be happy; she will come soon, won’t she, papa? Why didn’t you bring her back? She told me that she was going to get you.”

I turned my eyes away and made no reply. Ernest said to me in an undertone:

“My friend, you forbade us to mention your wife to you; but you must expect now that Henriette will mention her very often. You certainly would not want your daughter to cease to think of her mother?”

“No, of course not; besides, I am more reasonable now than I used to be. I am now curious to learn—Henriette, go and play with your little friends.”

My daughter went back to her brother and Ernest’s children. I sat between Marguerite and Ernest and said to them:

“Tell me what has occurred since I went away, and how it happened that my daughter was placed in your charge.”

“Yes, we will tell you all about it,” said Marguerite. “But first—I say, Ernest, have you told him?”

Ernest smiled but said nothing.

"What is it?" I inquired.

"We are married!" cried Marguerite, jumping up and down on the bench. "It is all settled—three months ago. Ah! I am not afraid of his leaving me now; I am his wife."

She ran to Ernest, took his head in her hands, and kissed him; he extricated himself, saying:

"Stop! you are rumpling my shirt."

"You see, Monsieur Henri, he is less agreeable already!—Oh! I only said that in fun."

"My dear friends, you have done well to be married, since that was your wish. I do not think that you will be any happier than you were, but I hope that you will be as happy. You have pledges of happiness."

I kissed Marguerite and shook hands with Ernest, who said:

"That is enough about ourselves, now let us come to your matters.—When you had gone, I determined to ascertain how Madame Blémont was behaving. But she appeared in society very little; and yet—for you know how just the world is—people pitied her, praised her highly, and blamed you for deserting her. One night she came to a large party where I was. Her costume was as elaborate as ever; but I thought that she had lost color, that she had greatly changed. I fancied that her gayety was forced, and I noticed that she relapsed constantly into a gloomy reverie, from which she emerged with difficulty. You know what sentiments Madame Blémont aroused in my breast. I was the only person in the world who looked at her with a more than severe expression, and I am convinced that she felt that I was the only one to whom you had confided your misfortunes; so that my presence always produced a magical effect

upon her; she ceased to talk, and it seemed to me that in my presence she dared not even pretend to be light-hearted.

"Bélan came to that same party with his wife and his mother-in-law. I do not know whether it was from malice or from stupidity, but on seeing me, he said to me:

" 'Well! so poor Blémont was nearly killed! He was knocked down in the Bois de Boulogne by some people riding. I heard about it from a young man who helped to pick him up.'

"Your wife happened to be standing behind us. I glanced at her and found that her eyes were fastened upon mine with an expression which I could not interpret. They seemed to implore me to listen to her. At once I turned my back and left the party. The next morning, at seven o'clock, your wife was at my house."

"At your house?"

"Imagine my surprise when she entered my study, trembling and hardly able to stand.—'Monsieur,' she said, 'I am convinced that you know of all my wrongdoing toward Monsieur Blémont; I have read in your eyes the contempt which you feel for me, and it has required much courage for me to venture to call upon you; but what I heard last night has made it impossible for me to enjoy a moment's rest. Monsieur Blémont was hurt in the Bois de Boulogne by some people on horseback. I remember very well that I passed him; can it be that I was unconsciously the cause of that accident? Have I that crime also to reproach myself with? Can it be that Monsieur Blémont has not recovered? For heaven's sake, take pity on my anxiety and conceal nothing from me.'

"I told your wife how the accident happened. She could not doubt that she was the original cause of it.

She listened to me without a word; she seemed utterly crushed. I felt bound to take advantage of that opportunity to tell her of the repulsion that you felt for your son, of your intention not to see him; and I concluded by handing her the memorandum book which you had left with me and which contained her portrait. When she saw it, a cry of despair escaped her, and she fell unconscious to the floor. Marguerite came and I placed her in her care. She will finish the story now."

"Mon Dieu! I have little to add," said Marguerite. "I found the poor woman unconscious; I did what I could for her, but when she came to herself she was in the most horrible state of despair. She desired to die, she tried to end her own life. She called upon you and her children, and gave herself the most odious names. Ah! I am sure that if you had seen her then, you would have had pity on her; for my own part, as I saw that she had an attack of fever, and that her mind wandered at times, I would not let her go home alone, but I went with her; then I sent and asked my husband's permission to stay with her until she was better, and he consented."

"Oh! what a kind heart you have, madame! you forgot the way that she treated you."

"Oh! I forgot that long ago, I promise you. In this world we must forget much, I think, and forgive often. Madame Blémont, in her lucid intervals, looked at me and pressed my hand without speaking. When she was really better, she thanked me for taking care of her, as if what I had done was not the most natural thing in the world; she asked me to forgive her for the evil opinion she had had of me. Oh! I forgave her with all my heart. She confessed that I had always made her very jealous, and I scolded her for suspecting you; I told her that you used to come to my little room solely to talk to us about

her, and she wept as she listened to me. But she wept much harder when she told me about her wrongdoing; and I too shed tears while she was telling her story, for I saw that she had always loved you, and that, except for her insane jealousy, her anger, and the bad advice she received——”

“ Well, madame? ”

“ Well, she told me that she regretted having refused you your daughter, and, notwithstanding the grief it would cause her to part with her, she had decided to comply with your slightest wish. She begged me to take charge of little Henriette until she returned. You can imagine that I consented. She also recommended your son to me—yes, your son, and she repeated the words several times. She told me that she was going to live in retirement, and to turn her back on society forever.”

“ And in fact,” said Ernest, “ she did abandon altogether the sort of life she had been leading formerly; she lived in the most complete solitude. But I learned a few days ago that she had gone to Mont-d’Or to take the waters, because her physician had prescribed that journey, her health being much impaired.—That is what has happened, my dear Henri. In telling you this story, we have not tried to move you by dwelling upon your wife’s repentance, although we believe it to be sincere. We know that her fault is not one a husband can forget, especially when he loved his wife as you did yours; but, even without forgetting, one sometimes forgives; and there are many guiltier women in the world. We cannot help pitying Madame Blémont, and sighing over the future of your children.”

“ My dear friends,” I said, taking a hand of each, “ when I went away two years ago, your only wish was that I should forget a guilty wife; you had witnessed

my despair, the tortures of my heart, and then you were perhaps more angry than I with the author of all my woes. To-day, the sight of Eugénie in tears, of her remorse, which I am quite willing to believe is sincere, has moved you, has touched you to the heart. You would like to induce me to forgive her; but do not hope for it. Although two years of absence have partly cicatrized the wounds in my heart, do not believe that it can ever forget the blow which was dealt it. Even if I should forgive her who destroyed my happiness, that happiness would not be revived, her presence would always be painful to me, I could never hold her in my arms without remembering that another also had enjoyed her caresses; such an existence would be a constant torment; I will not condemn myself to it. I cannot give my daughter a mother at that price; I think that I have done enough by maintaining her honor. Let us never return to this subject. As for little Eugène, I will do my duty. If I have not a father's heart for him, it is because I must have some enlightenment to banish from my heart the suspicions which have found their way thither. Ah! I am greatly to be pitied for not daring to love the child whom I called my son."

Ernest and Marguerite looked at each other sadly, but could find nothing to reply. I rose, thinking of Pettermann, whom I had left in the cab.

"Your house strikes me as a charming place; can you give me a room here?" I asked Ernest.

"It is all ready, and it has been waiting for you a fortnight."

"Very good; but I don't need Pettermann here; have I my apartment in Paris still?"

"Yes, I would not give it up on the last rent day, because I expected you."

"In that case Pettermann can go there; and I, as you consent, will board with you; I shall go to Paris as little as possible."

Pettermann was still sitting in the cab which was waiting in front of the house. I told him that he was to return to my apartment in Paris, to take up his quarters there, and to be always ready to bring what I needed to Saint-Mandé. Pettermann bowed, and drove away, saying:

"I am very glad that I didn't have to get out of the carriage."

Ernest and Marguerite showed me to the room which they had set apart for me. It looked on the garden, and I found it very much to my liking, especially when they pointed out to me, opposite my room, the room in which Henriette and her brother slept; I was very glad to be able to kiss my daughter as soon as I woke, and without disturbing anyone.

It only remained to show me the property. That was a joy for a landed proprietor, and Ernest and his wife were enchanted to do it. The house was not large, but it was pleasant and convenient. Moreover, Ernest was a genuine poet; he had no ambition; he would have been bored to death in a palace, and he agreed with Socrates. As for Marguerite, she fancied herself in a château, and she was never tired of saying, "our property." But she would add at once: "When I used to live in my little room under the eaves, I hardly expected that I should have a house of my own some day."

"A person is worthy of having a house of her own, madame, when it does not make her forget that she once lived under the eaves," I would rejoin.

Only the garden remained to be inspected. It was quite large, and at the farther end there was an iron gate

leading into Vincennes forest. At the end of the wall I saw a small summer house with two windows, one of which looked into the forest; they were both secured by shutters.

"What do you do with this summer-house?" I asked Ernest.

"I expect—I intend it for a study."

"True, it will be a quiet place for you to work in."

"But it isn't arranged for that yet," said Marguerite; "and as we have spent a great deal of money on our estate already, we shall wait a while before furnishing the summer-house; shan't we, husband?"

"Yes, wife."

Ernest smiled as he said that, and so did I, for Madame Ernest emphasized the word *husband*, which she uttered every instant, as if to make up for the time when she dared not say it.

I took my daughter by the hand to walk about the garden. Henriette was seven years old; she was not very large, but her wit and good sense amazed me. All the evening I kept her talking; her answers delighted me, for they denoted no less sense than goodness of heart. I could not tire of looking at her and of listening to her. More than once I had been terribly bored in a fashionable assemblage, but I was very sure that I should never be bored with my daughter.

The days passed quickly at Ernest's house. Painting, reading, walks with my daughter, occupied the time. In the evening we talked; a few friends and neighbors dropped in, but informally and without dressing; the men in their jackets or blouses, the women in their aprons. That is the proper way to live in the country. Those who carry to the fields the fashion and the etiquette of the city will never know the true pleasures of country life.

I had been a fortnight at Saint-Mandé, and I had not once been tempted to go to Paris. Pettermann brought me all that I desired and did my errands with exactness. I always asked him if anybody had called, although I never expected visitors. In society no one knew that I had returned from my travels. Monsieur Roquencourt and his niece did not know my address in Paris, and even if they had known it, I could not expect a visit from them. Doubtless Caroline had ceased to think of me. She did well. For my part, I confess that I very often thought of her, and sometimes I regretted that I had given her her portrait. But a smile or a word from my daughter banished such ideas.

There was another person of whom I often thought, although Ernest and his wife never mentioned her. I continually saw her, changed and pale as I had seen her at Mont-d'Or; and at night, in the woods or in the garden, I fancied that I still saw sometimes that white spectre, the sight of which had caused me to fly so hurriedly from the hotel at which I was living.

How could I forget Eugénie? Did not my daughter talk to me every day about her mother? Did she not constantly ask me if she would come home soon? I tried in vain to avoid that subject, Henriette recurred to it again and again; I dared not tell her that she made me unhappy by speaking to me of her mother; but could I hope ever to enjoy perfect happiness? Was there not always someone whose presence would prevent me from forgetting the past?

Poor child! it was not his fault that his mother was guilty. That was what I said to myself every day as I looked at him; but in spite of that, I could not conquer my feelings and conceal the depression which his presence caused me. I did not hate him, and I felt that I

should love him if I dared think that he was my son; but those cruel suspicions hurt me more than the certainty of the worst, for then I could have made up my mind with respect to Eugène, whereas now I did not know what course to pursue.

The poor boy had never seen a smile on my face for him; so that he always held aloof from me, and never came near me except when his sister brought him. Sometimes, as I walked in the garden, I saw Eugène in the distance playing with Ernest's children. Then I would stop, and, standing behind a hedge, would watch him for a long while. I passed hours in that way. He did not see me and abandoned himself without restraint to the natural gayety of his age, which my presence seemed always to hold in check. He feared me, no doubt, and he would never love me. Often that thought distressed me; at such times I was seized with a wild longing to run to him and to embrace him, to overwhelm him with caresses, for I said to myself: "Suppose he were my son?" but soon the painful thought would return, my heart would turn to ice, and I would hurry away from the child's neighborhood.

My daughter noticed that I did not caress her brother as I did her; for a child of seven makes her own little observations, and children notice more than we think. Henriette, who considered herself a woman beside her brother, because she was four years older than he, seemed to have taken little Eugène under her protection; she told him what games to play, scolded him, or rewarded him; in short, she played the little mamma with him. But when I called Henriette, I did not call Eugène; when I took her on my knee, I did not take her brother. Having observed all this, she said to me one morning as I had my arms about her:

"Tell me, papa, don't you love my brother? You never kiss him, you never speak to him; but he is a nice little fellow. He loves you too, my brother does; so why don't you take him in your arms?"

"My dear love, because we don't treat a boy as we do a girl."

"Ah! don't people kiss little boys?"

"Very seldom."

"But, papa, Monsieur Ernest kisses his little boy as often as he does his daughter."

I did not know what to reply; children often embarrass us when we try to conceal things from them. Mademoiselle Henriette, seeing that I did not know what to say to her, exclaimed:

"Oh! if you didn't love my brother, that would be very naughty!"

To avoid my daughter's remarks and questions, I determined to kiss her less frequently during the day. However, as I desired to make up to myself for my abstinence, I always went into the children's chamber when I rose. They were still asleep when I went in. Eugène's cradle was by a window, and Henriette's little bed at the other end of the room, surrounded by curtains, which I put aside with great care in order not to wake her. I never went to the cradle, but I left the room softly and noiselessly when I had kissed my daughter.

I had been doing this for several days. Henriette said no more to me about her brother, but glanced furtively at me with a mischievous expression; it seemed that schemes were already brewing in that little head.

One morning I went as usual to the children's room; I drew the curtains partly aside and kissed my daughter, and I was about to steal away on tiptoe when I heard a burst of laughter behind me; I turned and saw Henriette

in her nightgown, crouching behind a chair; she came from her hiding-place, and began to hop and dance about the room, saying:

"I knew that I would make you kiss my brother."

I looked at her in surprise, then hastily pushed aside the curtains of her bed; it was her brother who was lying there; she had put her little cap on his head, and his face was turned to the wall. He was the one whom I had kissed, as his sister had put him in her place. I was deeply moved. At that moment Eugène's little voice was heard; he called out without moving or turning:

"Can I move now, sister?"

"Yes, yes, it's all over," Henriette replied.

"What? What does he mean by that?" I asked.

"Oh, papa, he wasn't asleep, he was only making believe; I turned his face to the wall and I said to him: 'if you move, if you turn your head, papa will know you, and he won't kiss you.'—He was very good, you see, he didn't move at all."

I could hold out no longer; I took Eugène in my arms and covered him with kisses, as well as his sister, crying:

"After this you will both receive the same caresses from me; my heart shall know no difference between you; you shall be alike my children. Ah! it is better to love a stranger than to run the risk of spurning my son from my arms."

XXIII

THE MARRIAGE BROKER

Ernest and his wife very soon noticed the change that had taken place in my manner toward my son, and they seemed overjoyed. I told them what Henriette had done, and that the change was due to her. They lavished caresses upon her, and I did the same, for I owed it to her that I was much happier. Arriving one day from Paris, with books for me and toys for the children, Pettermann remained standing in front of me; it was his custom when he wished to say something to me to wait for me to question him; I had become used to that peculiarity.

"What is there new, Pettermann?"

"Nothing, monsieur, except that I met someone on my way here this morning."

"Met someone? Does that interest me?"

"Yes, it was some acquaintances of monsieur, some people who were at Mont-d'Or at the same time that we were; that pretty young lady with such a fine figure and the thin, lively, good-natured little man."

"Monsieur Roquencourt and his niece?"

"Yes."

"Where did you see them?"

"On the boulevard, as I was on my way to Faubourg-Saint-Antoine."

"You did not speak first to them, I fancy?"

"Prout! as if I would ever have thought of such a thing! I didn't even see them! All of a sudden I felt someone tap me lightly on the shoulder; I turned; it was the uncle. He was all out of breath; his niece was some distance behind. He said to me first of all: 'You walk terribly fast, my friend! Ouf! you made me run.'—I answered: 'Bless my soul, monsieur, I didn't know that you were following me.'—Just then his niece joined us. She seems to be as inquisitive as ever, the young woman; you remember, don't you, monsieur, that she asked me a lot of questions at Mont-d'Or?"

"Well, what did she ask you to-day?"

"First of all, how monsieur was; then as I had a package under my arm, she said: 'Where are you going with that?'—'To Saint-Mandé, mademoiselle.'—'Does Monsieur Dalbreuse live at Saint-Mandé?'—'Yes, mademoiselle.'—'And is that bundle for him?'—'Yes, mademoiselle.'—At that she began to laugh, with a queer expression, and I noticed that the head of a jack-in-the-box was sticking out of the bundle. The uncle asked me: 'Is Monsieur Dalbreuse running a marionette theatre?'—'No, monsieur; there are some books in the bundle for my master, but the toys are for the children.'—'What! has he children with him?' cried the young woman.—'Prout!' I said to myself at that; 'there seems to be no end to these questions.'—So I took off my hat and saluted them, and told them that I was in a hurry."

"Is that all, Pettermann?"

"Yes, monsieur."

So Caroline had not forgotten me, although we had not parted on very good terms. But that was no reason why we should cease to think of each other; so many people part on most excellent terms and forget each other at once! That reminder of Mademoiselle Derbin caused

me a pleasant emotion; she had such a strange temperament, a way of thinking that was not like other people's; and in spite of that, she had all the charm of affability of her sex.

If Pettermann had still been there, I would have asked him whether Mademoiselle Derbin had changed, whether she seemed as bright and cheerful as formerly. I would have asked him—I don't know what else. But he had gone. He had done well too. What occasion was there for me to think of Caroline? I had determined thenceforth not to love anybody except my children. It was a pity, however, for love is such a pleasant occupation!

It was three days after Pettermann had told me of that meeting. I was walking in Vincennes forest with my children. Eugène had become less timid with me; he smiled at me and kissed me, although he was not yet so unreserved as his sister, who made me do whatever she wished. I held a hand of each of them. I was listening to the chatter of Henriette and her brother's lisping replies, when my daughter mentioned her mother, and my brow darkened.

"Papa, why doesn't mamma come back?"

"She is ever so far away, my child. It may be that you won't see her for a very long time."

"But I don't like that. Why don't we go to fetch her?"

"That is impossible."

"Why?"

"I don't know where she is now."

"Oh dear! suppose she was lost!"

Henriette's eyes were full of tears; she looked at me as she asked that question. Poor child! if she had known how she hurt me! I did not know how to comfort her. If Eugénie had returned, I felt sure that she

would have asked to see her child; and I should never have denied her that satisfaction. But I heard nothing of her. Ernest and his wife never mentioned her to me, and although their silence was beginning to vex me, I did not choose to be the first to speak of Eugénie; besides, it was quite possible that they had heard no more from her than I had.

Henriette was still looking at me; impatient at my failure to answer, she exclaimed at last:

“Why, papa, what are you thinking about?”

“About you, my child.”

“I asked you if my poor mamma was lost, and you didn’t say anything. And Monsieur Eugène never asks about his mamma! That is naughty! He’s a hard-hearted little wretch!”

Eugène looked at his sister with a shamefaced air, then began to call out to me as if he were reciting complimentary verses:

“Papa, tell me about mamma, please.”

I kissed Eugène, and he was content with that reply; but my daughter caused me more and more embarrassment every day. However, she was capable of listening to reason, for her intelligence was in advance of her age. I stopped and sat down at the foot of a tree; then I drew my children to my side, and I said to Henriette:

“My dear love, you are no longer a child; I can talk reasonably to you.”

“Oh, yes, papa, I am more than seven years old, and I know how to read!”

“Listen to me: your mamma has gone away, to a very distant country; I do not know myself when she will come back; you must see that it makes me feel grieved not to see her, and whenever you mention her to me you increase my grief. Do you understand, my dear love?”

"Yes, papa. So I must never speak to you about mamma, eh?"

"At all events, do not ask me questions that I can't answer."

"But I can still think about mamma, can't I?"

"Yes, my dear Henriette; and be very sure that as soon as she returns to Paris, her first thought will be to come to embrace you."

My daughter said no more. That conversation seemed to have saddened both the poor children. They said nothing more, and I myself sat beside them, lost in thought.

A few moments later a gentleman and lady came toward us. I had not raised my eyes to look at them, but I had heard my own name. It was Monsieur Roquencourt and his niece.

They stopped in front of us.

"Yes, my niece was right, it is our dear friend Monsieur Dalbreuse!"

I rose and bowed to the uncle and niece. Caroline's manner was cold but polite.

I did not recognize that animated and playful countenance which attached so many people to her chariot at Mont-d'Or; she had assumed a much more serious expression. Her glance was almost melancholy; but how well that new manner became her! How great a charm that change gave her in my eyes!

"My niece said a long way off: 'There is Monsieur Dalbreuse;' but I admit that I didn't recognize you; and yet my sight is very good, I have never used spectacles. But who are these lovely children?"

"They are mine."

"Yours? Oh yes! I remember now—my niece told me that you were married. They are charming; the

little girl has magnificent eyes, and quite a little manner of her own. We shall make many conquests with those eyes.—And you, my fine fellow. Oh! you will play the handsome Leander with great success some day; you would be amazing with a club-wig.”

While Monsieur Roquencourt was looking at my children, his niece drew near to me and said in an undertone:

“So you have your children with you now?”

“Yes, mademoiselle.”

Then she stooped over Henriette and said:

“Will you give me a kiss, my dear love?”

My daughter made a dignified curtsy, then allowed herself to be embraced. Mademoiselle next took Eugène in her arms and kissed him. I do not know why I took pleasure in watching her do it.

“So you live at Saint-Mandé? We learned that from your servant, whom we happened to meet.”

“Yes, monsieur, I am passing the summer here; I am staying with a friend who was kind enough, with his wife, to take charge of my children while I was traveling.”

“There is one thing that you don’t know, and that is that we have been neighbors of yours since yesterday.”

“What?”

“Yes, I mean it. We have hired a little house, all furnished, at Saint-Mandé and we have installed ourselves there for the rest of the summer. It was an idea that came into my niece’s head. After we met your servant, she said to me: ‘I am not feeling very well, uncle.’—It is true that she has been out of sorts ever since we returned from Mont-d’Or.”

“Dear me, uncle! all this has very little interest for monsieur. What is the use of giving him all these details?”

"Anything that concerns you, mademoiselle, cannot fail to interest me."

Caroline turned her face away. Her uncle continued:

"Yes, my dear girl, you are not well; it is of no use for you to try to conceal it, for anybody can see it; and this solemn, melancholy expression which has taken the place of your former gayety—for you have lost all your gayety and——"

"Why, you are mistaken, uncle; I am just the same as always."

"Well, you insisted on coming here for your health—at all events you told me so; and when you insist upon a thing—you know, my dear Dalbreuse, it's just as it was when she made us go to drive at Mont-d'Or—it has to be done on the instant. And so, inside of twenty-four hours, we came, we saw, and we hired a house! And we must needs take possession of it at once."

"It was because I was bored to death in Paris; and then I—I did not know this neighborhood——"

"Well, I know it; but I am very fond of it. Dugazon had a country house at Saint-Mandé! I will show it to you when we return. We used to come here to have little supper parties and theatricals, and to enjoy ourselves. I played *L'Avocat Patelin*, and Petit-Jean in *Les Plaideurs*; and by the way, in *Les Plaideurs*, I played a wicked trick! You know, when——"

"But we are detaining monsieur, uncle; we are taking his time, perhaps!"

"Oh! by no means, mademoiselle; I was just going back to Saint-Mandé."

"We are going back there too; we will go together. As I was saying, it was in *Les Plaideurs*. In the third act, you know, some little dogs are brought on. Dugazon had said to me: 'Will you undertake to provide some

little dogs?' I already had my plan in my head, so I said: 'Yes, I will.' Very good. The performance began and the moment came when the unfortunate orphans are called for. I brought on a large open basket. Guess what came out of it: a dozen mice, which I had concealed inside and which instantly ran about all over the stage, and jumped down into the orchestra; and the men laughed and the women shrieked, for everyone of them thought that she had a mouse under her skirt! I held my sides with laughter! After the play, those ladies said that I was a monster! That affair was worth three conquests to me!"

Monsieur Roquencourt chattered on, and in due time we reached the village. Caroline had held Eugène's hand all the way, and had talked frequently with my daughter.

"Here is our hermitage," said Monsieur Roquencourt, stopping in front of a pretty house within two gun shots of Ernest's. "I trust that you will come to see us, Monsieur Dalbreuse. In the country one must be neighborly, —isn't that so, niece?"

"If monsieur chooses to give us that pleasure, if he would bring his children to see us, I should be delighted to see them again.—Would you like to come, my dear love?"

"Yes, madame."

"And you, my little man? you must like sweeties and I always have some."

Eugène replied with great solemnity that he would like to come to see the sweeties. I thanked her for the children and took my leave, promising to bring them the next day.

So Caroline wished to see me again; her fiery wrath against me was allayed; doubtless it was because the sentiment that had given birth to that wrath had also

vanished. But why had she lost her former playful humor? Upon my word, I was very conceited to think that it had anything to do with me. Might not Mademoiselle Derbin have some heartache, or some secret, with which I was absolutely unconnected? I would have been glad to know if she had seen Madame Blémont again before leaving Mont-d'Or. However, I was not sorry for the meeting. When Ernest was at work, it was impossible to talk with him; and his wife was constantly busy with her children and with her household cares. So I thought that it would be pleasant to go sometimes to Monsieur Roquencourt's for a chat.

At dinner I informed my hosts of our meeting.

"If they are pleasant people, ask them to come to see us," said Ernest.

I noticed that his wife did not second that invitation. I had said that Caroline was lovely, and wives sometimes dread the visit of a lovely person; Marguerite was a wife now.

"My friend," she said, "if they are people with twenty-five thousand francs a year and a carriage, I shall never dare to receive them."

"Why not, pray, my dear love? I am an author, and genius goes before wealth. Isn't that so, Henri?"

"It ought to be so, at all events."

"But, my dear, I am not an author, I have no genius——"

"That doesn't follow, my dear love; one is often found without the other."

"At all events, I shall not dare, or I shall not be able—you yourself say that we must not make acquaintances which will entail expense."

It seemed to me that Marguerite was getting mixed up; I fancied that I could see her making signals to her

husband; but he was trying to compose the concluding lines of a quatrain, and was not listening to Marguerite. I comforted the little woman by telling her that she was under no obligation to receive Monsieur Roquencourt and his niece.

"But you will go to see them?" she asked.

"Yes, I don't see what should prevent me."

"No, of course not. But you see, according to what I have heard of this young lady, who does not choose to marry, I have an idea that she is a flirt."

"Even if that were so, so long as her company is agreeable, I do not see that I have anything to fear."

Madame Ernest said no more; I saw plainly that she was not pleased with her new neighbor, and I could not imagine the reason; I did not propose that that should prevent me from going to see the new arrivals.

The next day I took my children to Monsieur Roquencourt's house. I found the uncle walking in his garden, with several people from the neighborhood. Rich folk soon become popular; the neighbors vie with one another in becoming intimate with people who own a carriage. Monsieur Roquencourt was telling his new acquaintances about a scene from *Monsieur de Crac*; he took my son and daughter by the hand, and offered to show them his garden and to let them taste his peaches. I let them go and went into the house to pay my respects to Caroline. I heard the notes of a piano. A piano! how many things that instrument recalled to my mind! Those chords caused me a sharp pang now. I remembered that Made-moiselle Derbin had told me that she played the piano. I strove to overcome my emotions, and I entered the salon where Caroline was. I listened to her for some time without speaking; I cannot describe my sensations. She stopped at last and I approached her.

"Were you there?" she asked me.

"Yes, I have been listening to you."

"Didn't you bring your children?"

"I beg pardon, they are with your uncle."

"Your children are lovely, and I congratulate you, monsieur, upon having them with you. It is a proof that your wife has forgiven your wrongdoing, since she entrusts to you her dearest treasures. That leads me to think that before long she herself——"

"Did you see her again before leaving Mont-d'Or, mademoiselle?"

"No, monsieur; she left the hotel where we were staying, on the day after you. Don't you know where she is now?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Upon my word, monsieur, I utterly fail to understand your conduct. You seem to love, to be devoted to your children, and you abandon their suffering, unhappy mother! If I had never seen you, and anybody had told me about you, I should have imagined you as hideous physically as morally; but when one knows you, one cannot think that."

Caroline smiled and I held my peace; that was the best course that I could pursue when that subject was broached. Henriette and Eugène came in from the garden. Caroline ran to them and embraced them and lavished toys and bonbons upon them; then, as I still remained silent, she sat down at the piano again and allowed her fingers to run over the keys for a few moments. Eugène was sitting in a corner, engrossed by his bonbons; Henriette was gazing in admiration at a lovely doll which had just been given her; but I noticed that, at the first sound from the piano, she stopped playing and listened. I listened too, for it seemed to me that

it was Eugénie to whom I was listening; there were the same talent and the same expression. Soon my illusion was intensified, for Mademoiselle Derbin, after a brilliant prelude, began a tune which I recognized: it was Eugénie's favorite. I was convinced that it was Eugénie who was playing, as in the early days of our married life. I was roused from that illusion by sobs; I looked up and saw that my daughter was sobbing bitterly and that the doll had fallen from her hands. I ran to Henriette, and Caroline did the same.

"What is the matter with you, my dear child?" I asked, taking her in my arms. "Why are you crying?"

"Oh! papa, it was because—because I thought that it was mamma playing!"

Poor child! I pressed her to my heart and I hid in her hair the tears which fell from my eyes.

Caroline was still standing before us, and I heard her say in an undertone:

"You see this child's tears, and still you do not give her back her mother!"

I came to my senses and comforted my daughter; Caroline overwhelmed her with caresses; but, despite her efforts to detain me, I went away with the children; for I heard Monsieur Roquencourt coming, and at that moment it would have been impossible for me to endure a stranger's presence.

I paid several visits to my neighbors, but Caroline did not play the piano again when I was there. She lavished caresses and presents upon my children, which they could not refuse; with me she was sad and silent, but she always declared that I went away too soon.

I saw that at Ernest's house the new neighbors were not liked; that seemed to me very unjust, because they did not know them. They cast disdainful glances upon

the toys that my daughter and Eugène received from Caroline; was it from jealousy, because her own children had not so many, that Madame Ernest cried down the presents that were given to my children? No, I knew Marguerite's warm heart; it was not susceptible of envy. Why was it then that she showed so much prejudice against Monsieur Roquencourt's niece?

On going one day to call upon Caroline, I was greatly surprised to meet Monsieur Giraud there. But I soon learned that he had been presented by a neighbor with whom he was passing the day. In the country one friend brings another to call, and Giraud was one of those people who ask nothing better than to be brought. He seemed delighted to see me; one always likes to find acquaintances in a house to which one goes for the first time; it puts one more at ease. When he discovered that I was a welcome guest in the house, that the uncle and niece manifested much regard for me, Giraud redoubled his cordiality toward me. I guessed his motive; he had not come there without a purpose; he must have heard that Mademoiselle Derbin was a marriageable person. A lovely and rich young woman—what a fine chance to negotiate a marriage! He desired to establish friendly communications in the house. He overwhelmed Caroline with compliments, which, I thought, did not touch her at all; but he listened with imperturbable patience while Monsieur Roquencourt recited the rôle of Mascarille; that might obtain him an invitation to come again.

But the neighbor who had brought him expressed a wish to go home. Giraud took his leave regretfully, asking permission to pay his respects to the uncle and niece when he happened to be driving at Saint-Mandé. They made a courteous reply, and he went away enchanted.

I went at the same time, for I saw that he wished to speak to me. In fact, we were no sooner outside the house, than he put his arm through mine, slackened his pace, calling to his friend to go ahead, and plunged at once into conversation with me.

"My dear fellow, it seems to me that you are very intimate, received on very friendly terms at Monsieur Roquencourt's?"

"Why, Monsieur Giraud, I flatter myself that I am well received wherever I go. If it were otherwise——"

"That isn't what I mean. Bless my soul! I know your merit, my friend, although you no longer live with your wife; but that doesn't prove anything. Look you, this young Derbin woman is a magnificent match, if what they tell me is true. But I shall make inquiries. Twenty-five thousand francs a year, unencumbered, and expectations from her uncle! and with all the rest, a pretty face, a fine figure, and talents! She plays the piano; does she play anything else?"

"I never asked her."

"Never mind! she is a most excellent match, and I have just the man that she wants."

"Indeed! you have——"

"Yes, you know very well that I always have husbands to offer. And so when Dupont, who is ahead of us there, spoke to me about this young lady, I said to him at once: 'You must take me there.'—He has brought me, and I shall come again. Are they always at home?"

"Except when they go out."

"But I mean, are they going back to Paris?"

"I have no idea."

"In that case, I shall come again soon; it is too good a chance not to make haste; somebody else will get ahead of me. Luckily Saint-Mandé isn't far away, and

there are the omnibuses. But you must help me a little, my dear fellow. Sound the uncle and niece and mention my young man to them."

"What young man?"

"The one whom I shall propose as a husband; a fine young fellow of twenty-two, an only son, with some money, who wants to buy a drug shop. However, if he doesn't suit, I have others. The important thing is to find out whether the girl has any previous attachment.—Do you know whether she has?"

"By what right, Monsieur Giraud, should I ask that young lady such a question?"

"Bah! one can always find that out, without asking; however, never mind, help me a little inside the house; and I will try to have Dupont help too. I must overtake him now. My friend, sound the young lady, I beg you. You can offer a very good-looking fellow, with a hundred thousand francs, and two handsome inheritances in prospect. By the way, if she doesn't like the idea of a drug shop, which is very likely when she has twenty-five thousand francs a year, he will buy a solicitor's practice—that will suit her better; or, if necessary, he won't buy anything at all. —Hallo! I say, Dupont, here I am!—The deuce! he is quite capable of dining without me."

Giraud left me. I could not help laughing at his mania for marrying everybody; I had an idea that it was his only business, and that in addition to ordering the wedding banquet, he obtained a commission from the husband.

If he relied upon me to speak to Mademoiselle Derbin, he would be disappointed in his expectations. Fancy my speaking in favor of a person whom I did not know! Indeed, I did not see that it was so necessary for people to marry at all.

Three days had passed since that meeting. I had forgotten Giraud, and I am inclined to think that they thought little about him at Monsieur Roquencourt's.

I had gone out for a moment without my children; I did not intend to see Caroline, but she was at the window when I passed; she saw me and beckoned to me to come in. Her uncle was in the garden and she was alone in the salon. Since our parting at Mont-d'Or, for some reason or other I was always embarrassed when I was alone with her.

For some time we did not speak. That is what often happens when two people have a great many things to say to each other. Caroline was sitting at her piano, but she did not play.

"Why do I never hear you play now?" I asked.

"Because it depresses you, and I do not see the sense of causing you pain."

"There are memories which are painful and sweet at the same time. I would like to hear once more that tune which you played the last time."

"And which made your daughter cry? Poor child! how dearly I love her!"

Caroline turned to the piano and played Eugénie's favorite piece. I abandoned myself to the charm of listening and to the illusion of my memories. My heart was swollen with tears, and yet I enjoyed it. Caroline turned often to look at me, but I did not see her.

Suddenly a great uproar roused us from that situation, which had much charm for us both. The doorbell rang violently. Soon we heard several voices and the barking of a dog.

"What a nuisance!" cried Caroline; "one cannot be left in peace here a moment; my uncle receives all his neighbors! I absolutely must lose my temper with him."

The noise kept increasing, and it seemed to me that I heard familiar voices. At last they came toward the salon, and lo! Giraud entered, with his wife, his daughter, one of his sons, and a tall young man dressed as if for a ball, who dared not move for fear of disarranging the knot of his cravat or rumpling his shirt collar.

Caroline watched the entrance of all those people with wide-open eyes. Giraud came forward with an offhand air and introduced his wife, saying:

“Mademoiselle, I have the honor to offer my respects, and to introduce my wife. Wife, this is mademoiselle, the niece of Monsieur Roquencourt, from whom I received such a cordial welcome last Sunday, and who urged me to call again when I was driving in this direction. These are my eldest son and my daughter. Bow to the lady, my children. Monsieur is one of our intimate friends; he was in our party and I took the liberty of introducing him.—Good-day, my dear Blémont; delighted to find you here again!”

Caroline bestowed a decidedly cool salutation upon the party; she contented herself with pointing to chairs. The Giraud family seated themselves; the young dandy took his seat on the edge of a couch, and Giraud at once continued:

“But where is our dear uncle, the amiable Monsieur Roquencourt? Bless my soul! how I did enjoy hearing him recite the part of Mascarille in *L’Etourdi*! and Monsieur de Crac! Ah! how good he was! I made my wife laugh heartily by telling her about it.—Didn’t I, my love?”

“Yes, my dear.—But, mon Dieu! what does Azor mean by searching under all the chairs like that? Come here, Azor.—Monsieur Mouillé, just give him a kick, if you please, to make him keep still.”

Monsieur Mouillé—that was the dandified young man's name—rose and tried to catch the dog. Being unable to do it, he gave him a kick, which made Azor fly from the salon yelping just as Monsieur Roquencourt entered. Everybody rose once more. Once more Monsieur Giraud introduced his family and his young man, adding:

“Monsieur Mouillé does not come to the country often; he has so much business to attend to since he inherited from his uncle the merchant, who left him a hundred and fifty thousand francs and a buggy.—Was it a buggy or a tilbury that your uncle had?”

“It was a jolting affair,” replied Monsieur Mouillé, without turning his neck.

Giraud made a wry face and continued;

“Yes—in short, a carriage. That is very well for a young man of twenty-three. But when I told him that we were going to pay a visit to such agreeable people, he no longer hesitated to accompany us. Wife, this is Monsieur Roquencourt, who, as I was saying just now, used to act so well! Dieu! how you did make me laugh when you recited *Mascarille*!”

Monsieur Roquencourt seemed at first rather surprised to find so large a party, brought by a man whom he had seen but once; but the instant that the subject of acting was mentioned, his features dilated, his eyes gleamed, and he exclaimed:

“Yes, pardieu! I should say that I have acted! and before Dugazon, Larive and many others!”

“That is what I told my wife and Monsieur Mouillé, that you acted before Dugazon. My dear, monsieur acted before Dugazon!”

“*Mascarille* is a fine part, very long; but, although I was very good in it, especially when I said: ‘*Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator*——’”

"Ah! charming! delightful! isn't it, wife? What did I tell you? *Fourbum imperator!*—Stop your noise, children!"

"I had other parts that I preferred. First of all, Figaro. Ah! Figaro! the costume is so pretty, and it was so becoming to me!"

"Yes, the costume must have been very becoming to you. Monsieur Mouillé, didn't you disguise yourself as Figaro once, to go to a magnificent ball given by a contractor?"

"No, monsieur, I went as Pinçon, in *Je fais mes Farces*."

"Oh! that is different."

"To return to my costume," said Monsieur Roquencourt, "it was white and cherry, and made of silk throughout. I believe I have it yet."

"White and cherry; and you have it yet! Ah! if you would put it on, how kind it would be of you!"

Caroline, who had not uttered a word during this whole conversation, now leaned over to me and whispered:

"Have these people come here with the purpose of making fun of my uncle?"

"No, there is another motive, which I will tell you."

Monsieur Roquencourt looked at Giraud a moment, but replied good-naturedly:

"Oh, no! I can't wear that costume again. It was twenty-five years ago when I wore it, and since that time I have taken on flesh, a great deal of flesh!"

"Yes, it is true, in twenty-five years one does change, one does grow fat.—Monsieur Mouillé, it seems to me that you have grown since last year."

"Three lines," replied Monsieur Mouillé with a bow.

"Three lines! the deuce! You will make a fine man! Mademoiselle has a fine figure too, one of those graceful

and slender figures which make it impossible for a small man to offer her his arm."

It was Caroline to whom this complimentary speech was addressed. She glanced at me with an impatient gesture, but Giraud, who thought that he had done the most graceful thing in the world in praising fine figures, had not thought of Monsieur Roquencourt, who was very short. The uncle stepped forward into the centre of the circle and said:

"Monsieur, you are greatly mistaken when you say that a man of medium height should not offer his arm to a tall woman; Mademoiselle Contat was by no means short, and she certainly found me a most satisfactory escort."

"Oh, Monsieur Roquencourt! Why, that is not what I said, or what I meant to say! The devil! let us understand each other. Little man! deuce take it! why, everybody knows that the heroes, the Alexanders, the Fredericks, the Napoléons, were all men of short stature. Isn't that so, Monsieur Mouillé?—Wife, for heaven's sake, make your daughter stop her noise."

"And on the stage, monsieur, it is much better to be short than tall, for the stage makes everyone appear taller."

"That is what I have said twenty times to my wife,—the stage makes people taller; and you know something about it, Monsieur Roquencourt."

"Yes, indeed I do. A tall man cannot play Figaro, or Mascarille, or Scapin.—Ah! how quick and active I was as Scapin! I had my portrait painted in the character."

"Your portrait as Scapin! Was it exhibited in the Salon?"

"They wanted to paint me as Monsieur de Crac too."

“Monsieur de Crac! My wife is still laughing because I repeated some scenes to her, after you. Ah! Monsieur Roquencourt! if you would only be good enough—Monsieur Mouillé has never seen Monsieur de Crac,—Have you, Monsieur Mouillé?”

“I beg your pardon,” replied the young man, “I think that I have seen it acted at Bobino’s.”

“Ha! ha! at Bobino’s, eh?” cried Monsieur Roquencourt. “Pardieu! that must have been fine! A difficult rôle like that! In the first place, you must be careful about the accent: *

“Dé façon qué dé loin sur lé pauvre animal
Lé perdreau, sans mentir, semblait être à cheval,
Et fût resté longtemps dans la même posture,
Si mon chien n’avait pris cavalier et monture.
Eh donc, que dites-vous?”

During this declamation, Giraud stamped on the floor and pretended to writhe with pleasure on his chair; Madame Giraud was occupied solely in keeping her children quiet, and Monsieur Mouillé did not stir.

“Ah! bravo! bravo!” cried Giraud. “I say, wife, you never heard such acting as that, did you?—Monsieur Mouillé, you should consider yourself very fortunate to have come to Saint-Mandé with us! very fortunate in every respect, indeed, for there is everything here that can seduce and fascinate!—Oh! Monsieur Roquencourt, something else—just a fragment or two.”

“I wonder if this sort of thing is going to last long,” Caroline whispered to me. I smiled but said nothing. Monsieur Roquencourt did not wait to be asked twice. He stepped forward again to the centre of the salon:

*That is, the Gascon accent.

"Here is a passage from the scene in which he is asked about his son; and it is his son himself who questions him, unrecognized by him."

"Ah, yes! I see.—Wife, somebody asks him about his son. Attention, Monsieur Mouillé! And it is his son himself. Do you understand?"

"I don't understand at all," replied the young man.

"Yes, you do; yes, you do.—Hush! be quiet, children!"

" Il sert contré lé Russe ;
Mais il sert tout dé bon. Ah ! lé feu roi dé Prusse,
Savait l'apprécier ; et lé grand Frédéric,
En fait d'opinion, valait tout un public.
Il admirait mon fils—J'en ai——"

Monsieur Roquencourt was interrupted in his declamation by the cook, who rushed into the room, exclaiming:

"Mon Dieu! what on earth is this dog that's just come here, mademoiselle? He came into my kitchen and jumped at everything there is there; he ate at one gulp the remains of the chicken that was on the table, and he's just carried off the leg of mutton that was for your dinner."

"Oh! it's because he's thirsty!" cried Giraud; "give him some water; he was very hot, give him some water, if you please, and then he will fawn all over you."

"Monsieur," said Caroline, rising and walking forward, with a very decided air, toward Giraud, "I am very sorry, but you really must give your dog water somewhere else; my uncle should remember that we have to go out this morning, we have very little time, and we cannot have the pleasure of detaining you any longer."

As she said this, Caroline gave her uncle a glance which he understood very clearly, and he faltered:

"Yes—yes, I believe that we have to go out."

Giraud seemed thunderstruck; he looked at his wife, who looked at Monsieur Mouillé, who looked at his trousers to see if they were creased.

However, the family rose; the dandified young man followed their example, and Giraud bowed low, saying:

"As you have an engagement, of course we do not desire to detain you; another time I trust that we shall be more fortunate, and that we may form a connection of which the fortunate result—Monsieur Mouillé, present your respects to mademoiselle. Bow, children.—Monsieur Roquencourt, we shall not forget your great amiability.—Azor! here, Azor! Azor! Oh! he will certainly come.—Au revoir, my dear Blémont."

The family backed out of the room, bowing, and Giraud whispered in my ear:

"Has she a previous attachment? If this young man doesn't suit her, I have others to offer. Write me what she has said to you."

They left the salon at last, and they succeeded in finding Azor, who rushed out of the house with a mutton bone in his teeth.

When the visitors had gone, Caroline said to the maid and the gardener:

"If those people ever show their faces here again, don't forget to say that we are not at home. Really, their impertinence is beyond bounds."

"Never fear, mademoiselle," said the cook; "I don't want to see the masters again any more than the dog. I've got my dinner to prepare all over again now."

"It's my uncle's fault; he invites everybody he sees; so long as they talk of the theatre and acting to him, that's enough for him; he would declaim before chimney sweeps!"

"You go too far, niece; did I go in search of this gentleman, and tell him to bring his wife and children and dog? He thinks that I act well, and I see nothing extraordinary in that; many other people besides him have thought the same. But as to declaiming before chimney sweeps! However, chimney sweeps may have a very keen perception; the common people aren't such bad judges as you seem to think, and Dugazon told me several times that at free performances the applause never came except when it was deserved. But you have no appreciation of acting, and before you it would be useless to have talent."

Monsieur Roquencourt was offended; he left us and went to his room. I also attempted to leave, but Caroline detained me, saying:

"Just a moment, if you please. You know this Monsieur Giraud, who seemed determined to plant himself here with his whole family and his friends too. He spoke to you in an undertone. You told me that you would tell me the purpose of his visit; will you be kind enough to do so, monsieur?"

I sat down again beside Caroline, and I could not help smiling as I said to her:

"Mademoiselle, this Monsieur Giraud has a mania, or a vocation for arranging marriages. When he learned that you were still unattached, he at once conceived the plan of finding a husband for you."

"The impertinent fellow! Why should he mix himself up in the matter?"

"As he is convinced that everybody must always come to that at last, he displays the most incredible perseverance in his schemes. He had already requested me to speak to you in favor of the young man whom he brought here to-day."

"What! that great booby?"

"He was an aspirant for your hand, yes, mademoiselle; and, despite the unflattering welcome that you bestowed upon Giraud and his protégé, I should not be at all surprised if he returned to the charge again soon, with a new *parti*."

"I assure you, monsieur, that I shall not receive him again. What you have told me makes the man more intolerable to me. The idea of attempting to arrange a marriage for me! Can one imagine such a thing?"

Caroline's face had become serious. She lowered her eyes and seemed to be lost in thought; after a moment she continued:

"Marry! oh, no! I shall never marry. For a moment I thought that it was possible. It was a delightful dream that I had, but it was only a dream. I deceived myself cruelly!"

Those words distressed me greatly, and yet, could I be sure that they were addressed to me? I could not try to ascertain; but in spite of myself, I moved nearer to Caroline, who had dropped her head sadly upon her breast, and I took her hand, which I had never done before; but she seemed so depressed that I longed to comfort her. I did not know what to say to her. I dared not ask her the reason of her determination. We sat a long while thus without speaking; my hand gently pressed hers, but that did not comfort her, for tears poured from her eyes. Then I put my arm about her waist; I felt her heart beat beneath my fingers. I almost breathed her breath.

Suddenly she pushed me away, moved her chair away from mine and exclaimed:

"Ah! I did not believe that I was so weak; but at all events I will not be wicked; no, I will not add to the

grief of a woman whom I pity, whose happiness I would like to restore. And since I am unable to conceal my feelings from you, we must meet henceforth only in company, only before strangers; yes, I swear to you that this is the last tête-à-tête that we shall have."

Having said this, she hurried from the salon, and I left the house, realizing that we should in truth do well to avoid each other.

XXIV

THE SPECTRE

After my last tête-à-tête with Caroline I went less frequently to her house, and never went there without my children. The season was advancing; we were to stay in the country but a short time, and I took them to walk with me in the woods every day. Sometimes Madame Ernest went with us; I noticed that she was more friendly with me, that she was in better spirits since I had ceased to pass so much time at Monsieur Roquen-court's. I concluded that she must have something against her neighbors. But as she was as kind and attentive as always to me and my children, and as her husband's affection for me showed no diminution, I asked them for nothing more.

I often noticed that Madame Ernest seemed to want to speak to me. I could read faces well enough to feel sure that she had something to say to me. But if that was so, what prevented her? When I was lost in thought,

I saw her scrutinize me furtively, then look at my children; but she either said nothing or talked about things which could not interest me.

One afternoon we all went into the forest of Vincennes together. I led Henriette and Eugène by the hand, and Madame Ernest led her little son and daughter. Night was approaching. As we entered a shaded path, Eugène cried:

“Oh! I’m afraid of the spectre here!”

“Of the spectre?” I said, taking him in my arms. “Who has told you anything about a spectre, my dear?”

“The nurse,” cried Madame Ernest’s little girl; “she says there’s a spectre in our house, and that she’s seen it in the garden.”

“Your nurse is a silly creature, and so are you, mademoiselle,” said her mother hastily; “I shall forbid her to talk to you about such things.”

“Oh! I have heard about it too,” said Henriette, “and the nurse declared that she has seen, or heard, the spectre near the little summer-house.”

“Mon Dieu! what idiots those people are! And how can you repeat such things, Henriette—such a sensible girl as you are?”

Madame Ernest seemed very much irritated that there had been any talk of spectres. I began to laugh.

“Why, really,” I said, “it almost seems as if you took the thing seriously. Do you imagine that I am going to run off as fast as I can because these children say that there’s a spectre in your house?”

“No, of course not; but don’t you agree with me that it’s wrong to make children timid by talking to them about such things?”

“That is the very reason why it is better to laugh with them than to be angry. I am very sure that you are

not afraid of the spectre, Henriette, because you understand that there are no such things."

"Oh! papa, I don't know whether there are any such things, but I'm a little bit afraid too. And the other night I woke up and thought I saw something white going out of my room. Oh! I wanted to shriek; but I just put my head under the bedclothes."

"But, my dear love, you ought to find out first of all what you're afraid of. What is a spectre? Tell me."

"It is—I don't know, papa."

"Oh! I know," cried little Ernest, "a spectre is a ghost."

"Indeed! and what is a ghost?"

"A spectre."

"Bravo! you are quite capable of explaining the Apocalypse!"

"A spectre," cried the little girl in her turn, "is a devil with a red tail and green horns, that comes at night and pulls naughty little children's toes."

That definition made Marguerite and me laugh; but I agreed that she would do well to scold the nurse for telling the children such tales. Young imaginations should never be terrified and darkened. The time when things cease to look rose-colored to us comes quickly enough.

We returned to the house talking of spectres. I kissed my children, who went off to bed; then I walked in the garden. It was a magnificent evening and seemed to me to invite one to breathe the cool, moist air. I soon found myself near the summer-house, which was not occupied. The moon was shining on that part of the garden; but its light always inclines one to melancholy. As I glanced at the clumps of trees about me, I remembered the spectre of which we had been talking, and although I am not a

believer in ghosts, I realized that, by assisting one's imagination a little, it was easy to see behind that foliage ghostly figures which moved with the faintest breeze.

I seated myself on a bench by the summer-house. The night was so soft and still that I did not think of returning to the house. The image of Caroline, the memory of Eugénie, presented themselves before my mind in turn. I sighed as I reflected that I must fly from the first because she loved me, and forget the other because she did not love me. But she was the mother of my children. They had spoken of her again that day, and had asked me if she would come home soon. I did not know what reply to make. Ernest and his wife never mentioned Eugénie, and their silence surprised and disquieted me. Not a word of her—nothing to tell me where she was, what she was doing, or if she were still alive. She was so changed, so ill, at Mont-d'Or! I would have liked to hear from her. I could not love her, but she would never be indifferent to me.

In these reflections I forgot the time. A sound quite near me caused me to raise my head. It was like a faint sigh. I saw nobody, so I stood up. It seemed to me that I could distinguish, through the leaves, something white running toward the other end of the garden. I remembered the spectre. My curiosity was aroused; I walked to the path where I thought that I had seen something; but I found nothing, and I decided to go to my room; for it was late and everybody else had already retired, no doubt.

I certainly did not believe in ghosts; but I recalled Madame Ernest's impatience when the children mentioned the subject, and I suspected that there was some mystery at the bottom of it all. I determined to solve it, for something told me that I was interested in it.

I went to bed, but I could not sleep. Tormented by my thoughts, I decided to rise again, and I was about to open my window when it seemed to me that I heard a noise at the end of the corridor, in my children's room. I opened my door very softly. At that instant a sort of white shadow came out of the other room. I confess that my heart fluttered slightly at first. I was on the point of rushing toward that mysterious being; but I restrained myself and waited silently, without moving a hair, to see what was the meaning of it all.

After closing the door of the children's chamber, the shade stopped and picked up a lantern; then it walked slowly toward me. It was a woman; I could see that. —But I recognized her: it was Eugénie!

She walked very softly, apparently afraid of making a sound. Her white dress, and the long muslin veil that was thrown back from her head, gave her a sort of ethereal, unsubstantial aspect at a distance. I had no doubt that she was the spectre that had frightened the nurse and children.

Poor Eugénie! her face was almost as pale as her clothes. What a sad expression in her eyes! what prostration in her whole person!—She stopped; she was standing at the head of the stairs. She turned her face toward the room she had just left, then looked in my direction. I trembled lest she should see me; but no, I had no light and my room was very dark. She made up her mind at last to go downstairs; I ran to my window and saw the little lantern pass rapidly through the garden and disappear near the summer-house.

So it was Eugénie who occupied that building, which was always carefully closed; Ernest and Marguerite had given it to her so that she could readily go to the house to see her children. So she was there—very near me—

had been there a long while perhaps, and I had no suspicion of it. What was her object, her hope? Was it because of her children only that she had concealed herself there?—But Ernest and his wife knew perfectly well that I would not prevent her from seeing them.

I determined to learn the motive of Eugénie's conduct, and the plans of Marguerite and her husband. To that end, I must be careful not to let them suspect that I had seen the pretended spectre; and I must try to learn something more the next night.

The intervening time seemed terribly long to me. During the day, I involuntarily walked toward the summer-house several times; but everything was closed as usual. I noticed that the door, which was on the side of the building toward the forest, was very conveniently situated for anyone to go in and out of the garden unseen.

The night came at last. I kissed my children and they were taken to their room. When I supposed that they were asleep, I bade my hosts good-night and withdrew to my room, on the pretext that I had a violent headache; but I had no sooner entered the room than I stole forth again softly, without a light, and went to that occupied by my children. The key was in the door; I went in, and sat down by my daughter's bed to wait until somebody should come; both she and her brother were sleeping quietly.

At last, some time after everybody was in bed, I heard stealthy steps outside. I instantly left my chair and hid behind the long window curtains. I was hardly out of sight when the door was softly opened, and Eugénie entered the chamber, carrying her little lantern, which she carefully placed at the foot of her son's cradle.

She threw her veil back over her shoulders, and, stealing forward on tiptoe, leaned over Henriette's bed

and kissed her without waking her; she did the same with Eugène, then sat down facing the children and gazed long at them as they lay sleeping.

I dared not move; I hardly breathed; but Eugénie was almost facing me; I could see her face and count her sighs. She put her handkerchief to her eyes, which were filled with tears, and I heard broken sentences come from her lips.

“Poor children! What an unhappy wretch I am! But I must deprive myself of your caresses—you will never call me mother again. And he—he will never more call me his Eugénie!—Oh! cruelly am I punished!”

Her sobs redoubled, and I had to summon all my courage to refrain from flying to her, wiping away her tears and pressing her to my heart as of old.

We remained in those respective positions for a long while. At last Eugénie rose and seemed to be on the point of taking leave of her children, when someone softly opened the door. Eugénie started back in alarm; but she was reassured when she recognized Marguerite. The latter carefully closed the door, then seated herself by Eugénie’s side; and although they spoke in low tones, I did not lose a word of their conversation.

“My husband is working; I did not feel like sleeping, and I thought that I should find you here; so I came as quietly as possible. However, there’s no light in Monsieur Blémont’s room, and I fancy that he has long been asleep.—Well! still crying! You are making yourself worse—you are very foolish.”

“Oh! madame, tears and regrets are my lot henceforth. I cannot expect any other existence.”

“Who knows? you must not lose hope; if your husband could read the depths of your heart, I believe that he would forgive you.”

“No, madame, for he would always remember my sin; nothing would make my motives less blameworthy in his eyes. And yet, although I am very guilty, I am less so perhaps than he thinks. You have understood me, for women can understand one another. But a man! he sees only the crime, without looking to see what might have driven a woman to forget her duties. And yet, heaven is my witness that, if I had loved him less, I should never have become guilty. If he should hear me say that, he would smile with pity, with contempt; but you—you know that it is true.”

Eugénie laid her head on Marguerite's shoulder, and sobbed more bitterly than ever. For some minutes they said nothing. At last Eugénie continued:

“I know that my jealousy did not justify me in becoming guilty; but, my God! as if I knew what I was doing! I believed that I was forgotten, deceived, betrayed, by a husband whom I adored. I had but one desire—to repay a part of what he had made me suffer. ‘Play the flirt,’ I was told, ‘and you will bring your husband back to your arms; men soon become cold to a woman whom no one seems to desire to possess.’—I believed that; or, rather, I believed that Henri had never loved me; and then I tried to cease loving him. You know, madame, how jealous I was of you. That ball at which you were—at which he danced with you—oh! that ball fairly drove me mad. Before that, my jealousy had banished peace from our household. Alas! it was never to return! I plunged into the whirlpool of society; not that I was happy there; but I tried to forget, and I was pleased to see that he was distressed by my conduct.

“Fatal blindness! I preferred his anger to his indifference! When I had once sinned, I cannot attempt to

tell you what took place within me; I tried to deceive myself as to the enormity of my sin; I lived in a never-ending whirl of dissipation, afraid to reflect, doing my utmost to put Henri in the wrong, to convince myself that he had betrayed me a hundred times, and, for all that, realizing perfectly that I had destroyed my own peace of mind forever. When my husband learned the truth, I did not stoop to try to obtain forgiveness by tears. No, I preferred to try to deceive myself still.—Great heaven! what must he have thought of my heart on reading the two letters that I wrote him! A woman who detested him would not have written differently. But, as if I were not already guilty enough, I tried still to make him believe that I felt no repentance for what I had done. I continued to go into society. ‘He will know it,’ I said to myself; ‘he will think that I am happy without him;’ and that thought strengthened me to hold myself in check in the midst of the crowd and to affect a gayety which was so far from my heart. But I knew nothing of his duel and his illness. Those two things, which I learned at almost the same time, made it impossible for me to put any further constraint on myself; it seemed to me that a bandage fell from my eyes. The thought that I might have caused his death terrified me. From that moment the world became hateful to me! I realized the depth of my wrongdoing; when I knew you and heard what you said, I found that I had suspected Henri unjustly, that he really loved me when I believed that he was unfaithful to me. He loved me, and it was by my own fault that I lost his love! Oh! madame, that thought is killing me—and you expect me to cease weeping!”

“But why shouldn’t you consent to let us mention you to him, to let us try to move him?”

“ Oh, no! that is impossible; somebody else has tried it already, and to no purpose, as I have told you. That young woman, Mademoiselle Caroline Derbin, whom he met, I believe, at Mont-d’Or,—that young woman, who thought that he was a bachelor at first, learned, I don’t know how, that he was my husband; then, believing that it was he who had abandoned me, she begged him, implored him, to return to me. I was near them, without their knowing it, in the courtyard of the inn; I overheard all their conversation. He was kind enough also to allow himself to be blamed for wrongs of which he was not guilty; he did not try to disabuse her with regard to me. But, when she begged him to return to me, I heard him say: ‘ We are parted forever!’—Ah! those cruel words echoed in the depths of my heart, and I cannot understand why they did not kill me, although I had lost all hope of obtaining forgiveness.”

“ There is nothing to prove that his answer to Mademoiselle Derbin represents his opinion to-day. I told you how he had changed to his son, poor little Eugène, whom he would hardly look at when he first came here; now he seems as fond of him as of his daughter.”

“ Oh! since I first sinned, I have known but one moment’s happiness—that was when I learned that he no longer refused to take his son in his arms! Poor child! because your mother was guilty, could your father treat you as a stranger all your life? But I solemnly swear that I was without reproach when my son was born, and Henri can safely take him in his arms!”

What I had heard caused me such intense pleasure that I cannot describe it; I had to lean against the window; for joy often takes away all our strength. Luckily Marguerite continued the conversation; they did not hear the movement that I was unable to restrain.

"What makes me hope that Monsieur Blémont may yet forgive you, madame, is the pains that he has taken to conceal your wrongdoing. Nobody knows anything about it; he alone has incurred all the blame."

"Oh! he has done that for the honor of his name, for his children; but do not infer from that that he will forgive me. Henri loved me too dearly—and I wrecked his life! No, I entreat you again, never speak to him about me! Let him forget me—but let him love his children! Is not that all that I can ask? Thanks to your kindness—to your compassion for me—I can at least see him. Hidden in the summer-house which you have given me, I can look into the garden through a hole in the shutters. Henri often walks there; sometimes I hear his voice, I see him with his children.—Then—oh! madame, such joy and such agony as I feel!—Had I not a place between my children and him?—And I can never occupy it again!"

"Poor Eugénie! Calm yourself, for heaven's sake."

"Oh, yes! I must restrain my sobs, for I don't want to disturb my children's sleep. I can kiss them every night; that is my sole consolation; but they do not call me their mother any more. Oh! madame, it is ghastly never to hear that name!"

"You could come to see them if you chose. You could send for them to come to you. Monsieur Blémont has never had any idea of depriving you of their caresses."

"No, I am no longer worthy of them. Besides, they will grow up. What can you reply to children who ask you why you do not live with their father? It is much better that they should not see me; that they should forget their mother!"

After another interval, filled only by Eugénie's subdued moans, she continued:

"Alas! my heart is torn by still another pang. You have guessed it—you who can read my heart so well, who are so kind to me, and whom I misunderstood and blamed for so long!"

"Hush!" said Marguerite, embracing her; "haven't I forbidden you to mention that again? But I have some good news for you: for some days Monsieur Blémont has been to see Mademoiselle Derbin much less frequently; he passes less time with her."

"He goes there less? Is it possible? Oh! I no longer have any right to be jealous, madame, I know; I have no claim to his heart; and yet I cannot reconcile myself to the thought that he loves another. And this Caroline is so lovely; and then she loves him—I am perfectly sure of that."

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh! women are never mistaken about such things, you know. I discovered it at Mont-d'Or; I was certain of it when I overheard their conversation on the evening that he left. To be sure, she begged him to come back to me; but her voice trembled, she could hardly restrain her tears. In short, she spoke to him as one speaks to a person whom one loves, even when one is trying to pretend to hate him. Poor Caroline! she had thought that he was free and a bachelor. She had abandoned herself without fear to the pleasure of loving him."

"Very well; but now when she knows perfectly well that he is married, and above all, when she thinks that it was he who deserted you, why does she bring her uncle here to Saint-Mandé, and settle down within two steps of us? Why does she invite Monsieur Blémont to come to see her? Is that the way for a woman to act with a man whom she is determined not to love, whom she is

trying to forget? I confess that that has not given me a very favorable opinion of that young lady, and Monsieur Blémont must have noticed more than once that I don't like her, although I don't know her."

"What can you expect? She still loves him—she longed to see him again. But if only he might not love her! Since I have seen him every day, since, thanks to you, I have been living so near him, I have indulged in illusions; I have fancied sometimes that I still reigned in his heart; and the awakening is very bitter!—No, I am nothing more than a stranger now; I can never recover the place that I once filled in his heart. Others must have his love."

"Why forbid us to speak to him of you sometimes?"

"Oh! never, never, I implore you! My children speak of me to him; I often hear them ask about their mother. If he is deaf to their voices, do you think that he will be moved by yours? Wait until he himself—but he will never ask what has become of me!"

"I cannot believe that he has entirely forgotten you.—But it is late; you must go; it is time for you to be in bed."

Marguerite took the light, while Eugénie went to look at her children and kiss them once more. But Marguerite led her away and they both left the room, closing the door with great caution.

I listened to their footsteps for a few seconds, until I could no longer hear them. Then I left my hiding-place, and I too kissed my children, but with a keener delight than usual; and, taking equal precautions to make no noise, I returned to my room. The conversation that I had overheard was engraved on my memory, and my course was already resolved upon, my plan of action formed.

XXV

LUCILE AGAIN

On the day following that night which was to change my destiny, I wrote to Pettermann to come to Saint-Mandé to receive some commissions to which I wished him to attend. My faithful German speedily appeared; but he seemed to me to act with some constraint, and when he stood in front of me he did not speak.

"Well, Pettermann, what is there new?" I asked him. "I can see that you have something to tell me; why don't you speak?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes, I have something to tell you, but I don't know how to put it."

"Explain yourself!"

"You see, I'm afraid that you'll think I'm an idiot; when I say one thing and do another.—Faith, prout!—but never mind! Monsieur knows well enough that men are not phœnixes! Here goes! Monsieur knows that I am married?"

"Yes."

"And that I left my wife because we didn't agree. She beat me and didn't want me to drink; I wanted to drink and not to be beaten."

"Well, Pettermann?"

"Well, monsieur, a few days ago I met my wife, and she spoke to me; she was as sweet as honey—in short, we melted toward each other. She asked me if I still got drunk; I told her that it only happened once a month;

she said: 'Nobody can find fault with once a month.'—In short, monsieur—you see—I've promised to take my wife back. But what makes me miserable is that then I shall have to leave you; and I'm afraid monsieur is angry with me too."

"No, Pettermann, no; take back your wife. Far from reproaching you, I approve your resolution. What is your wife doing now?"

"She's a concierge, monsieur, in a fine house within ten yards of the one where we live."

"Well! it is possible that you may remain with me."

"Ah! ten thousand prouts! how I should like that!"

"Is there a pleasant apartment to let in your wife's house?"

"Two magnificent ones—partly decorated; one on the second, one on the third; with wood-shed and cellar; plenty of mirrors. I know everything there is in the house."

"Hire the apartment on the second floor for me. Is it empty now?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You will have my furniture moved there. Go to my upholsterer—here is his address. He will look over the apartment and do whatever he considers necessary, so that there may be nothing lacking. Everything must be finished and all ready for our reception in four days at the latest; for then—I am going to tell you something in confidence, Pettermann—then I am going to take back my wife too."

"Your wife? Why, is monsieur married?"

"Yes, my friend; and like you, I have not always agreed with my wife, although the causes of disagreement were not at all the same."

"Oh! I imagine not."

"But to-day I realize that I have done wrong, and I hope to find happiness once more with my wife and my children."

"Faith! it pleases me to know that, monsieur. As monsieur does the same thing that I do, my mind is at rest. And I shall still be in monsieur's service?"

"Yes, my friend. You understand me, do you not? See that everything is ready in four days."

"It shall be ready."

"But until then not a word—no indiscretion!"

"I am as dumb as a dead man."

Pettermann returned to Paris.

I felt more content with myself, better satisfied; and yet—I may confess it to myself—I had no love for Eugénie—no. But perhaps it was for the very reason that I had no love for her that it was possible for me to return to her. I saw in her the mother of my children, and I did not wish to condemn her to never-ending misery. We should never be to each other as we had been—that was impossible. I would treat her with consideration and affection, and time would do the rest. I should have to cease entirely to see Caroline. Ah! that was not the least of the sacrifices I should have made to my children. But, since everything was decided, since my resolution was irrevocable, I determined to go to see her on the next day for the last time, and to tell her that I was going back to my wife. She would think that I was influenced by her advice, her entreaties; I would not undeceive her.

I returned to the salon where all the others were assembled. I determined to forget myself, to be cheerful and merry. I played with the children, I kissed Madame Ernest, and I laughed with her husband.

"What's the matter with him to-day?" Ernest and his wife asked each other; "how happy he seems!"

"I am happy."

"What has happened to make you so cheerful?"

"I have had news that pleased me."

"From whom?"

"Oh! you shall know later."

The husband and wife exchanged glances; but I felt sure that they did not guess my purpose, and I continued at once:

"What is going on to-day? I feel strongly inclined to amuse myself."

"Why, we might go to the ball," said Ernest; "to-day is the last Saint-Mandé ball, and they say that it will be very fine."

"I haven't been to one of them since I have been living here; I should not be sorry to see it. We will go. Do you agree?"

"Oh! I don't go to balls," said Marguerite; "I don't care for them; I prefer to stay with the children. You two may go. But don't speak to any women; for there are women at all these balls in the suburbs of Paris."

We promised to be good; and immediately after dinner Ernest and I started for the place where the local balls were held. As the weather was superb, there were in addition to the people from Saint-Mandé and from Vincennes, many Parisians, who desired to enjoy one more rural festivity. Numerous carriages were standing on the outskirts of the crowd.

"The deuce! this will be magnificent!" said Ernest. "I'll bet that we shall find more than one actress here; the princesses of the wings delight in open air balls."

"You know that you promised your wife to be good."

"Oh! my friend, we always promise, and we keep our promise if we can!—Come, my dear Blémont, the music is striking up."

In fact, the dancing had begun. There was a great crowd; many pretty dresses, some peasants, a few bourgeois, and a large number of kept women. It is the same at all open air balls.

We had not walked ten steps when I heard my name called; I turned and saw Bélan, with his wife and his mother-in-law on his arm, apparently very proud to escort his superb Armide. He honored me with a gracious nod; then, after finding seats for the ladies, he came to me and led me away from the dancing.

"Well, my dear Blémont, as you see, everything is arranged and I have returned to the fold. I was a lost lamb, as my mother-in-law says; but everything is forgotten and I have once more become reconciled with my wife."

"That is what I supposed when I saw you just now. But I confess that it rather surprised me. After taking your affairs into court, after having your name published in the newspapers——"

"What difference does that make? What do the newspapers prove? Besides, as the court decided that I was mistaken, that I wasn't a cuckold, I can't claim to know more than the judges."

"If I remember aright, you talked in a very different tone at Mont-d'Or; you proposed to appeal from the judgment against you."

"Do you think that I said that? It's possible. It is true that I was excited then—anger, you know, and jealousy—a man often says foolish things. I am more reasonable now. On my return from Mont-d'Or her relations came to me; they told me that Armide was inclined to forgive me. At that, I said: 'Let us forget all our disagreements.'—All my friends tell me that I have done well to take back my wife."

"I am far from blaming you; but if I had been in your place, I would have made less noise about it."

"Oh! I like to make a noise—to make people talk about me. As soon as I go anywhere nowadays, I hear people whispering when they look at me. They say: 'That's Monsieur Ferdinand Bélan,' as they might say: 'That is Voltaire, or Frederick the Great.' I confess it doesn't displease me. But au revoir, my dear fellow; the ladies await me, and I like dancing with Armide."

I had no desire to detain Bélan. What a strange man! And yet not so strange after all; we meet with such characters not infrequently. But I did not enjoy his society at all.—He had caused me to lose sight of Ernest, and I set out to find him again.

I returned to the place where they were dancing. Ernest was performing with a lady from Saint-Mandé. As I did not care to dance, I was looking about for a seat, when my eyes met those of a young woman who beckoned to me. It was Caroline, sitting with her uncle, and she offered me a chair beside her. I hesitated, for before long I must cease to enjoy her society; but that would be the last time before bidding her adieu forever. To refuse would have been discourteous. So I stepped forward and took the proffered seat by her side.

"It took you a long while to decide," she said with a smile, "although we are not alone here."

I made no reply; I dared not even look at her; for I found her eyes very dangerous since coquetry had ceased to shine in them. Luckily her uncle put an end to my embarrassment.

"You do not dance, Monsieur Dalbreuse?"

"No, monsieur; I don't care for dancing now."

"I used to be very fond of it myself; in fact, I was a very good dancer. I remember that, in *Amphitryon*,

when I played Sosie—A very nice rôle, that of Sosie! Dugazon made me rehearse it very carefully.—You know the famous scene of the lantern. Dugazon used to leap over the lantern and cut all sorts of capers; but I proposed to do differently. I placed the lantern—look, like this chair, at about this distance. Then I ran forward, making a pirouette as I ran, and I executed a very neat *entrechat* as I landed on the other side. It was very difficult. Look—I'll just turn the chair over so that I can show you better."

"What, uncle! are you going to jump over chairs now?"

"No, my dear, no, I don't intend to jump; but I was explaining to Monsieur Dalbreuse what I did as Sosie; and I flatter myself that no actor at the Français ever jumped higher than I did."

Luckily for Monsieur Roquencourt, one of his Saint-Mandé neighbors came to bid him good-evening, and seated himself in the chair that he was about to take. That saved Monsieur Roquencourt the trouble of showing me how he jumped, and he entered into conversation with the newcomer.

"You are not dancing?" I said to Caroline.

"Oh, no! I shouldn't care to dance here, except with somebody whom I know very well. Besides, I am like you, I no longer care for dancing. I don't intend to go to any balls this winter—or into society at all. All the things that I used to enjoy so much bore me terribly now. I shall stay at home—alone—with my thoughts. To be able to think at one's leisure is such a great satisfaction sometimes!"

She looked at me, then we both lowered our eyes and relapsed into silence. Meanwhile Monsieur Roquencourt was almost quarrelling with his neighbor.

"I tell you, monsieur, that Dugazon never played Moncade in *L'Ecole des Bourgeois*!"

"I beg your pardon, but I saw him."

"You are mistaken—it was Fleury."

"No, it was Dugazon."

"But it is impossible; the part wasn't in his line. It is as if you should say that you had seen me play Hamlet or *Œdipe*; it is absolutely the same thing."

"I don't know what you have played, but I saw Dugazon play the Marquis de Moncade."

"Oh! that is enough to make a man jump to the ceiling!"

But the little uncle could not jump to the ceiling, as we were under the trees; so he contented himself with falling backward with his chair; which made me afraid that he proposed to play Sosie again. Caroline and I could not help smiling. That diverted our thoughts for a moment. Suddenly Mademoiselle Derbin, who was watching the dancing again, said to her uncle:

"Ah! there is my lace-mender; how finely she is arrayed! She hasn't a bad style; really one would think that she was a lady of fashion. Look, Monsieur Dalbreuse—that woman in a lilac hat is she."

I looked at the person she pointed out to me, and I felt a shock of terror, as if I had seen a serpent.

It was Lucile—Lucile, whom I had not seen since the fatal day. Her presence seemed to revive all the agony that I had felt then. I cannot describe the pain that the sight of her caused me.

My features must have expressed very clearly what I felt, for Caroline instantly said to me:

"Mon Dieu! what is the matter? You must know that woman."

"Yes, I—that is to say, long ago, but not now."

"What did she ever do to you that the sight of her should upset you to this extent?"

"Nothing; but for some unknown reason, when I looked at her, I remembered—Sometimes one cannot account for one's sensations."

At that moment the quadrille came to an end. Lucile and her partner came in our direction. Great heaven! she sat down a few feet away; she saw me and gazed fixedly at me. I could not endure that woman's presence, her eyes; I rose abruptly, forced my way through the throng, left the ball, and did not stop until I reached a place where I was alone.

So I was destined never to be happy, never to lose the memory of my sufferings! When I had decided to forgive Eugénie, to give my children a mother, the sight of that Lucile must needs recall everything that I wanted to forget. How she stared at me! She seemed to enjoy the torture, the shame that her presence caused me. Malice gleamed in her eyes.—Ah! I had hoped that I never should see Lucile again!

I threw myself down on the turf and tried to be calm. After all, my chance meeting with that woman would make no change in my plans. I would learn to control myself better in the future; but I would travel a hundred leagues, if necessary, to avoid meeting Lucile.

I lay in that spot nearly half an hour. At last, feeling more tranquil, I rose; but I could not decide whether I would return to the ball. Ernest was waiting for me, no doubt. I walked a few steps, then stopped, for I did not want to see Lucile again. While I was hesitating, a woman came toward me from the direction of the dance. She was almost running. I waited anxiously.—Ah! it was Caroline.

She joined me and hung upon my arm, saying:

"I have found you at last! I have been looking for you everywhere.—Oh! how glad I am! But come—let us go into the woods, so that I may speak out to you at last. I have so many things to say to you! I told my uncle not to be worried, that you would bring me home."

I listened to Caroline in amazement; some extraordinary change seemed to have taken place in her; she was not at all the same person whom I had left a short time before. She took my arm and pressed it gently; she seemed intensely agitated, but it was evidently with joy.

We went into the woods, and Caroline said, gazing affectionately into my face:

"I must seem very mad, very reckless to you, my friend, but you have no idea of all that I have just gone through! Within a few moments, my destiny, my future has changed. Now I can be happy. I loved you—you know it, for I have not been able to conceal my feeling for you. Without telling each other so, we understood each other perfectly.—But that love was a crime; at least I thought so. I blamed myself for it; I tried to avoid you, to forget you.—*Mon Dieu!* how unhappy I was! —But now I know the whole truth; I know that I am at liberty to love you."

"What? what do you mean?"

"That I know all.—Oh! forgive me for questioning that woman, but I could not resist my curiosity. Your confusion at the sight of her seemed so strange!"

"That woman! Have you talked with Lucile?"

"Yes, and I know now that, far from being guilty toward your wife, you were shamefully deceived by her."

"Oh! hush! hush!"

"Never again, I give you my word, will I remind you of a thing that has caused you such pain. Now I can understand why you would not go back to her—why you

fled from her. I blamed you; I thought that I was an obstacle to your reconciliation, and that is why I tried to go away from you. But, since things are as they are, why should I doom myself to everlasting misery? why should I not abandon myself to the sentiment which you have inspired in me?"

"What are you saying, Caroline? If my wife were guilty, am I the more free for that?"

"Free? no, I am well aware that I cannot be your wife. But what do I care for that title? it is your love alone that I want; as you know, I worry very little about the world and the proprieties. I am my own mistress; why should I not dare to love you? Because you are bound to somebody who has made your life wretched, must you drag out your whole existence in bitterness and solitude?—No! on the contrary, I propose, by my love, to make you forget your sorrows. It will be so sweet to me to be your only friend—to have all your thoughts, every moment of your life!—But you do not answer? Great God! have I made a mistake? Can it be that you do not love me? Oh! then there is nothing left in life for me—I can only die!—Henri! Henri!—He does not answer!"

She had placed her head on my breast. I cannot describe what took place within me. How could I spurn, how fly from a woman whom I loved? I had not the strength. I raised that lovely head. As I sought to comfort her, my face touched hers; our cheeks were burning, our lips met. We forgot the whole world, we existed only for each other.

I do not know how long we stayed there on that turf, the scene of our transports. I was happy, and yet something oppressed and saddened me. I was afraid to reflect. Caroline had thrown her arms about my neck;

she was engrossed by her love. I looked about and listened; there was no sound to be heard.

"It is very late. I think that I must go home," said Caroline; "you will go with me, won't you, dear?"

"Of course."

"Where are we?"

"I don't know; but I should think that we were not far from Ernest's garden. Yes—that wall——"

"True—and I think that I see a summer-house too."

"A summer-house? Oh! let us go at once."

"You will come to-morrow, won't you, dear?—However, I shall see you every day now."

"Yes, I will see you to-morrow—I will talk with you."

"How strangely you say that! What is the matter?"

"Nothing. But come—let us go away from here."

Caroline put her arm about me; mine was about her waist, and in that position we walked away from the spot that had heard our oaths. It was very dark, we had not taken ten steps when our feet tripped over something. Caroline stooped and exclaimed with a shriek of terror:

"O my God! it is a woman, my dear!"

"A woman!"

I shuddered from head to foot; I hardly dared to lower my eyes to examine the woman who lay at our feet.

"She seems to be dead!" cried Caroline.

"Dead! Ah! if it were——"

I fell on my knees, I raised the unfortunate creature's head, I put aside the leaves that shut out what light there was in the sky. A low groan escaped from my breast. I was utterly overwhelmed. It was Eugénie, it was my wife, who lay inanimate before me.

Caroline had heard me murmur Eugénie's name, and she too recognized the unhappy woman; thereupon she

fell on her knees beside her and abandoned herself to despair, for she guessed that it was she who had caused her death. For my part, I could neither speak nor act. I was dumb, turned to stone, before that shocking spectacle. Suddenly Caroline cried:

“Ah! her heart is still beating! She is not dead!”

Those words revived me. I stooped and took Eugénie in my arms, while Caroline held the branches aside. But where could I find help so late? Ernest's garden was the nearest place. I went to the little gate; it was open and we entered. There was a light in the summer-house, the door of which also was open. It was plain that she had gone out in haste. We went inside and I laid Eugénie on the bed. Caroline looked about and brought me water and salts; then she ran to the house, to summon help.

I was left alone with Eugénie; I poured water on her forehead and temples, while I tried to warm her ice-cold hands with mine. At last she moved; she opened her eyes, recognized me, and, taking my hand, put it to her mouth, murmuring:

“Ah! I am happy once more! You are with me!”

“Eugénie, return to life and happiness. I have forgiven you! I had made up my mind to restore a mother to her children.”

“Is it possible? But no; it is better that I should die. You love another; I heard you. I was here, your voice reached my ears; I hurried out into the forest, and I saw you in her arms. That killed me. And yet I deserved this punishment.—I pray that Caroline may make you happier than I have done!—Tell me again that you forgive me, that you will love your son——”

“Eugénie!—Great God! She is fainting again—and no one comes!”

Ernest and Marguerite rushed into the summer-house and ran to the bed. Eugénie opened her eyes again and held out her hand to me, murmuring:

“I have not seen my children.”

Marguerite started to go out, but Eugénie motioned to her to stop.

“No,” she faltered, “they are asleep, don’t wake them.”
Then she too fell asleep, but never to wake again.



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